

THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION IN THE THEOLOGY
OF JOHN CALVIN WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO
THE REFORMED CONFESSIONS OF FAITH.

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by
James Reginald Elias

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PREFACE

In this ecumenical age it is necessary for each Christian Communion to consider again the doctrines which have been prominent in its historical development. For the benefit of the whole Body of Christ each communion must assess its doctrines in the light of our present understanding of Scripture, seeking to purge and reassess them, thus making them relevant to our modern situation.

This Thesis is an attempt to emphasise the importance and prominence of the doctrine of election for the Christian Faith through studying its formulation in the writings of John Calvin, one of the finest systematic theologians of the Church. The writer considers that a proper understanding of election is an important contribution the Reformed Church can make to ecumenical discussion today, remembering the words of Emil Brunner that "if there is any point at which it is urgent that the Church should re-examine the content of the Christian Message, it is certainly at the point of the doctrine of the Divine decree and election". In some quarters of the Christian Church the very idea of predestination appears to be regarded as a perversion of the Christian Faith - often this attitude is justified because of the unhealthy accretions which have become attached to the term. But any candid reading of the New Testament will convince one that the fact of God's election is deeply embedded there, and when one recognises the part the doctrine has played in the development of Christian thought throughout the centuries there comes the realisation that to cast aside this aspect of the Faith is to break with historic Christianity.

The writer is convinced that the rediscovery of the doctrine of election will furnish the Church and the proclamation of the Gospel with that "objectivity" so needed in a day when pietism, theological liberalism, and Pelagianism all too

readily rear their ugly heads within the Church, especially amidst the doctrinal fluidity necessarily wrought by ecumenical discussion.

Further, we may not repeat classical expositions of this doctrine, since theology is always relative to the Word of God as it speaks to every generation. Many at the same time do not feel happy about the classical expositions of this doctrine and their relationship to other aspects of Christian theology: therefore this is an attempt to explore election from within, to understand its "core" and to rephrase its essential message. In all this it must be borne in mind that a doctrine can only be rejected if it is shown to be theologically unsound, not just because we emotionally dislike it.

Finally, from the literature available, it appears that Calvin is best understood on the Continent, not so well understood in Britain, and least understood in South Africa. If this thesis contributes in our present situation to a better understanding of election and as an introduction to the theology of Calvin the writer will be content: it has done this for him.

SUMMARY.

Chapter One: The Origins and early discussion of Election.

Election is strictly speaking to be distinguished from predestination. Election is a fundamental motif of the Old and New Testaments. There are two strands in the New Testament, Johannine and Pauline, which are not reconciled. The basic attitude of the Fathers to election lacks clarity; they lay emphasis on free-will. Some statements of the early Fathers on election; I Clement, Ignatius, II Clement, Hermas. With the Apologists the election motif almost disappears. Statements from Justin Martyr and the martyrdom of Polycarp. With Irenaeus the term "predestination" reappears. Quotations from Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, and Cyprian. General observations on the Fathers' attitude to election. In the second century the Pauline strand overshadows the Johannine strand: three reasons for this. Ambrose on election. Conclusion: no fixed doctrine of election in the Church before Augustine.

Chapter Two: St. Augustine on Election.

Calvin received a strong bias on the subject from Augustine who was the first to treat the doctrine seriously. The influence on Platonism on Augustine. His early teaching on man. His ideas on election were fixed by A.D. 397. The Pelagian controversy produce adaptations of earlier thought on predestination. His mature teaching on original sin. His view of grace. Augustine stresses the two acts of God: election and preterition. Double predestination? Augustine was the forerunner of supralapsarianism. His 'definition' of predestination. Predestination and perseverance. The order of the divine decrees. Predestination and Christ. Criticism of Augustine's position.

Chapter Three: Introduction to Calvin's Doctrine of Election.

The place the doctrine holds in his theology according to various theologians. Calvin's pronounced aim in writing theology. An examination of his exposition of the doctrine in the first edition of the Institutes; his basic ideas do not alter in later editions. His first formal exposition of predestination in the Confession of Faith, 1537. His treatment in the second edition of the Institutes. An examination of the varying positions given to the doctrine to show that predestination was not the central motif in Calvin's theology: the Institutes, the Catechism, the Confessions. Predestination became increasingly important because of the controversies with Pighius, Bolsec, and Castellio. Niesel's comment: 'he found in it the expression of the evangelical doctrine of grace'. The place given the doctrine by Calvin shows the great practical relevance of election to him. The factors which influenced his formulation: Scripture, Augustine, and Bucer. The doctrine is not peculiar to Calvin: it is common to all the Reformers.

Chapter Four: Presuppositions: Calvin's doctrine of man and doctrine of God:

The Imago dei as it appears in Calvin's theology. His view of Original Sin. The doctrine of Total depravity. The will in nature. Man's knowledge of God after the Fall and natural religion. The basis for Calvin's doctrine of God. The relation between God's action and man's life in the world. Calvin's attitude to secondary causes. His two conceptions of God's actions in relation to the world. Two objections to his understanding of God.

Chapter Five: Calvin's Doctrine of Election.

The influence of Isidore (7th C.) and Gottschalk (9th C.). Calvin definitely warns against the speculative approach to election. His theology is regulated by the Incarnation. Our knowledge of the divine purposes must be gained from the Word. Calvin's definition of predestination. Was Calvin infra- and supralapsarian? Calvin's doctrine of Reprobation: he struggles to reconcile the two causes of reprobation, God's counsel and man's sin. Effectual calling: a. the covenant, b. the four signs of vocation: the Gospel, Christ, faith, and sanctification.

Chapter Six: Calvin's Doctrine of Election (cont.)

Election in relation to the Church. Election and the sacraments. Election and the Scriptures. Election and Christ: i. the relation of those elected to Christ. ii. Christ's part in their election. iii. Christ's work and the elect. The proclamation of the Gospel. A criticism of Calvin's position. An appreciation of Calvin's emphases.

Chapter Seven: Election in the Reformed Confessions of Faith.

The confessions must be tested in the light of the modern understanding of Scripture. The danger of systematisation. An outline of Infra- and Supralapsarianism. An examination of selected confessions:

Confessio Gallicana
Confessio Belgica
Confessio Scoticana
The Thirty Nine Articles
The Second Helvetic Confession
The Heidelberg Catechism
The Synod of Dort
The Westminster Confession.

The basic agreements between the confessions:

- a. Absolute predestination is a common presupposition.
- b. The nature of predestination: it is seen as particular and according to the good pleasure of God.
- c. Predestination includes the means to salvation.
- d. The object of predestination: basically they present the infralapsarian position.

Election in the confessions compared with the biblical approach to election:

- a. The difference in 'tone' between the confessions and Scripture.
- b. The place assigned to reprobation.
- c. The doctrinal perversion caused by the usage of the term "decree".
- d. The influence of Eph. 1.4 "before the foundation of the world....."
- e. The misunderstanding of the relation of time and eternity.

The essential message of the confessions.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion.

We must point the way to an understanding of divine election consonant with Scripture. The various reactions to predestination caused through unhealthy speculations. The warning of the Westminster Divines.

The fundamental traditional error: equating "election" and "predestination". We may not interpret predestination from a philosophic standpoint, but strictly from a religious point of view. The various philosophic problems which have been raised are not even touched upon by the writers of Scripture. Predestination is the indication that salvation is of God. Kuyper's remark. Interpreting predestination on an eternity/time scheme harms the Christian concept of God: He becomes pre-temporal.

At the basis of our study is the belief that Jesus Christ is the source of all knowledge of God: this applies equally to election which must be understood in Christological terms. There have been two emphases in discussing election: the anthropological and the theological. The former does not do justice to the fact of God's election.

There is no decretum absolutum; we cannot go behind Christ to know the will of God. Christ sums up all election: that of Israel and the Church. He is the Chosen One; but He is also the One who chooses.

The traditional doctrine has misunderstood the object of election. Christ is the Elect One who bears our reprobation in Himself. "Double predestination" may be spoken of only in terms of Calvary: here the Elect bears our reprobation and rejection. The two attributes of God, mercy and justice, are not divided. Through the Resurrection the whole of humanity is placed under the sign of God's election: this does not imply universalism. Election must be confessed through faith. Election is therefore a living act ever confronting us in Christ. "Free-will" an unscriptural word as Calvin perceived. There is freedom only where the gracious news of God's election is proclaimed; Reprobation is the denial of God's choice of us - reprobation remains a mystery. It reveals the depravity of man's nature.

Only in God's election does the Church find her basis for preaching the Gospel. The Church is indebted to John Calvin for having perceived this so clearly.

CHAPTER ONE

THE EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION.

In our study of John Calvin's doctrine of election a very brief attempt will be made to understand the development of this doctrine from the Old and New Testaments through the early Fathers to St. Augustine, to whom Calvin constantly refers in the Institutes of the Christian Religion and in his various polemical works. This will prevent us from the ever-recurring error of ascribing to John Calvin the honour or dishonour for originating the doctrine of predestination which, in fact, has been one of the most contentious subjects in the history of Christian doctrine.¹

Strictly speaking election is to be distinguished from predestination with which it is usually confounded.² The idea of predestination runs through Scripture in relation to the all-embracing, comprehensive design of the Divine will in creation, providence and salvation. Election refers to the special work of God in His redemptive purpose. Predestination is the more speculative idea, while election is the more religious idea. However, in our study we shall regard the terms as being synonymous, following the usage of John Calvin and other great exponents of this doctrine. "Predestination" as well as "election" will be used in a soteriological context unless otherwise indicated.

Election in the Old and New Testaments.

Election is a fundamental motif of the theology of the Old and New Testaments, lying at the very heart of revelation and redemption. Its essence in the Old Testament is that God

¹ Predestination has, however, never been discussed alone in controversy. Original sin, the extent of the atonement, and the nature of grace have always been discussed together with predestination.

² For election - Heb. $\gamma \pi \ddot{\alpha}$ Gk. ἑκλογή
 For predestination - Heb. $\dot{\gamma} \ddot{\alpha}$ $\gamma \ddot{\alpha}$ Gk. προορισμός

has chosen a nation from among other peoples to make her his own³. Although this choosing by God was a fundamental certainty of Israel's faith, it nevertheless remained outside the realm of rational explanation. The only reason given why He had chosen them was that He loved them and desired to be faithful to His covenant with and promise to their ancestors.⁴ The people was elect because it was loved by God.⁵ The only possible explanation was that election had its ground in God Himself in His sovereign freedom of action. For Israel, election was no mere concept but an incontrovertible fact of history: she was the living proof that God elects according to His grace. She, on the other hand, was called to approve herself worthy of God's choice by her obedience to the Law.⁶ Yet God's election was not by arbitrary caprice; it was always directed towards the fulfilling of His plan for the salvation of the world. The people had been chosen to execute a mission among the nations; and while its election carried with it certain privileges (divine blessing, protection and deliverance), it imposed an obligation impossible to avoid without being unfaithful or breaking the covenant. Thus the fact of divine election is stamped indelibly on the Old Testament: the election of Israel as God's people, narrowing to the choice of a remnant within Israel, is the Old Testament prelude to the coming of the elect One, from whose action the Christian Church is called into being as the company of the elect, continually enlarging its range and membership.⁷

³ G.C. Berkouwer, Divine Election, Pg. 311. Here attention is drawn to the fact that the Hebrew "bachar" (to elect) does not mean simply "choosing from" but the divine granting of His good pleasure. Cf. N.H. Snaith, The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament, Pg. 131 - 142.

⁴ Deut. 4:37 ; 7:8 ; 10:15.

⁵ Deut. 23:5.

⁶ J. Jocz, A Theology of Election, Pg. 58.

⁷ J.G. Riddell, God's Eternal Decrees, article in the Scottish Journal of Theology, Vol. 2 (1949), Pg. 360.

Finding its source in the classical Old Testament understanding of the immediate creative activity of the living God - "the priority of the divine" - and in the apocalyptic presupposition of God's determination even over the powers of the present evil age, election was from first to last one of the most deeply rooted preconceptions of the Apostolic writers.⁸ The New Testament is full of this theme, and its vocabulary - *κλητος, κλησις, ἐκλεκτος, ἐκλεγῆσθαι, ἐκκλησια*, displays this emphasis quite clearly.

The content and purpose of New Testament passages which touch on election are always testimony to divine favour: there is an utter absence of a definite and deliberate election to destruction.⁹ In the New Testament the fact that they are elected certifies to those who constitute the Christian community that they are the new and true Israel, the people of God partaking in all the promises.¹⁰ Election reveals to them that they are called to salvation in sanctification¹¹; that they are called of God, justified and already glorified¹²; that unto them is given the mystery of the kingdom of God¹³; that they are blessed by God the Father of Jesus Christ¹⁴. In the New Testament election revolves around three divine movements: the divine ordination to discipleship, to the apostolate, and to the community. This is essentially a participation in the salvation of the present Messianic kingdom.

Election is present in the Synoptic Gospels. Jesus often deliberately casts His teaching into parabolic form to

⁸ E. Stauffer, New Testament Theology. Pg. 51f.

⁹ F. Davidson, Pauline Predestination, Pg. 26.

¹⁰ 1 Peter 2:9

¹¹ 2 Thess. 2:13.

¹² Rom. 8:30.

¹³ Mk. 4:11.

¹⁴ Eph. 1:3f.

prevent those not spiritually prepared from responding to it.¹⁵ Moreover, in a strange affirmation He states that many are called but few are chosen¹⁶, that few will be saved¹⁷, and that every plant not planted by His Father would be rooted up.¹⁸

In the book of the Acts election is set within a missionary context. In Peter's first sermon he explicitly states that:

"For to you is the promise, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call unto Him".¹⁹

Similarly when Paul turns to the Gentiles at Antioch it is stated that "as many as were ordained to eternal life believed".²⁰

However, the two main strands of teaching are never brought together, those of St. Paul and St. John.

St. Paul scarcely ever touches upon the question of individual predestination²¹: he is sure that those who have been called and justified have also been predestinated by God²² but he nowhere works out the relationship between the individual and Church in regard to election. Rather for him all who have been baptised have put on Christ, and are therefore Abraham's seed and heirs of the promises of God.²³ Election to Paul is primarily corporate and the Church is "the eschatological congregation", chosen by God in the last times to proclaim the Gospel in the short interim before the End.²⁴ This same

¹⁵ Matt. 7:13f.

¹⁶ Matt. 22:14.

¹⁷ Luke 13:23f.

¹⁸ Matt. 15:13.

¹⁹ Acts. 2:39.

²⁰ Acts. 13:48.

²¹ In the light of modern scholarship Romans 9-11 cannot be interpreted in terms of individual salvation and damnation. Paul discusses here the destiny of God's people, Israel, not the eternal fate of individuals.

²² Rom. 8:29f.

²³ Gal. 3:27f.

²⁴ It will be noted that in various places in this study I am indebted to S.H. Russell for certain insights taken from the thesis A Study in Augustine and Calvin of the Church regarded as the number of the elect and as the body of the baptised.

understanding of election as corporate is found also in I Peter and the Apocalypse: individuals are addressed or referred to as "elect" because they belong to the Church.

The second strand is found in St. John where the Divine pre-ordination realises itself as each individual decides for or against Christ within history. The writer sees history as conflated with the End, and therefore already pregnant with decisions to be revealed at the Last Judgement. Here Jesus states explicitly that all whom the Father had given Him should come to Him²⁵, while no man is able to come to Him unless he is drawn by the Father.²⁶ The Johannine writer sees history as conflated with the End and therefore already pregnant with the decisions to be revealed at the Last Judgement; Paul, however, obeys his own injunction to judge nothing before the Day²⁷ and therefore can only understand God's pre-destination directly in relation to the eschatological community and not to the individuals of which that community is composed.²⁸

Both writers relate election closely with Jesus Christ. According to Paul we are chosen by the Father in Christ before the foundation of the world²⁹ and this is quite in accord with his whole theology. As Christ is the seed of Abraham to Whom all the promises belong, we only share in them as we share in His election. In the Fourth Gospel also the work of election belongs to the Son as well as to the Father³⁰ and the sayings which refer to the donation of the elect to the Son by the Father must be interpreted in conformity to the subordination-within-equality pattern found in the Gospel in explication of

²⁵ Jn. 6:37.

²⁶ Jn. 6:44.

²⁷ I Cor. 4:5.

²⁸ S.H. Russell, Op.cit. Pg. 68.

²⁹ Eph. 1:4.

³⁰ Jn. 13:18 ; 15:15,19.

the relationship between the Father and Son.³¹ Election in both writers is thoroughly Christocentric, but in St. Paul the emphasis lies on identification with Christ in Whom, as the Seed of Abraham, all the promises are Yea and Amen, while in St. John the importance lies on the inescapable decision to faith and obedience evoked by the Judgement of God Who has entered history.

In concluding Biblical representation of election we must agree with Warfield when he says

"It is not too much to say that it is fundamental to the whole religious consciousness of the Biblical writers, and is so involved in all their religious conceptions that to eradicate it would transform the entire scriptural representation".³²

The Fathers on Election.

Turning to the Fathers we find that this doctrine is not as prominent in their writings as in the New Testament. It is generally asserted that the lack of discussion on election in the early Church was the result of the peculiar apologetic situation which they faced. The early Church was not able to do justice to the doctrine of God's counsel and decree because of the necessary emphasis with which man's moral nature, freedom and responsibility had to be defended over against heathen fatalism and gnostic naturalism.³³ Man was seen as injured by the Fall yet he remained free and was able to accept the grace offered him by God. Torrance's conclusion reveals why God's act of election played a minor role among the Fathers,

"... religion was thought of primarily in terms of man's acts towards God, in the striving toward justification, much less in terms of God's acts for man which put him in the right with God once and for all"³⁴.

While the earlier Fathers allude to the doctrine of election, they do not appear to have had a clear conception of it; thus absolute predestination and irresistible grace were not taught.

³¹ cf. K. Barth, Church Dogmatics, Vol 2, Pt. 2, Pg. 106.

³² B.B. Warfield, Biblical Foundations, Pg. 246.

³³ H. Bavinck, The Doctrine of God, Pg. 345.

³⁴ T. Torrance, The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers, Pg. 133.

Berkhof affirms that "on the whole they regarded it as the prescience of God with reference to human deeds, on the basis of which He determines their future destiny".³⁵ God was seen as giving up to unbelief those whose persistent unbelief He foresees, and electing those whose merits He foresees. Both Brunner and Cunningham³⁶ believe the emphasis placed on man's freedom and responsibility by the early Fathers to be a reaction against the idea of Fate which dominated the philosophies and religious systems they opposed. In this situation they were led to the extreme opposite to predestination, to a doctrine of Free Will which they developed in common with the Stoic idea of *ἄντεφοῦλον* as the presupposition of moral responsibility. Some ambiguity is apparent also when one tries to understand precisely what some of their statements on grace imply, for they occur commonly in polemics against the Gnostic sects to whom a fatalistic principle was congenial.³⁷ Martin's statement sums up their attitude:

"the mental attitude of the Fathers is determined by a close adherence to the received sacred pronouncements and by the endeavour to repel whatever in contemporary cults appeared plainly contrary to them".³⁸

We must now consider briefly some statements of the early Fathers on election.

Selected Statements of the Fathers on Election.

In I Clement we find the most definite teaching on election in the post-Apostolic age. At the beginning of his letter to the Corinthians he censures their strife as being foreign to those "who are the elect of God."³⁹ He proceeds to remind them of the early days of the Church when they

³⁵ L. Berkhof, Systematic Theology, Pg. 109.

³⁶ E. Brunner, The Christian Doctrine of God, Vol. I, Pg. 340. cf. Wm. Cunningham, Historical Theology, Vol. I, Pg. 325.

³⁷ Wm. Cunningham, Historical Theology, Vol. I, Pg. 325.

³⁸ A.S. Martin, Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, Vol. V, in an article on Election, Pg. 259.

³⁹ Clem. Rom. Epist. ad Corinth. i:1

struggled that "the number of God's elect might be saved".⁴⁰ He then continues to tell them to approach the Lord, loving the Father "who has made us a part of the election".⁴¹ One of his final benedictions is "may the all-seeing God, who elected the Lord Jesus Christ and us through Him to be a peculiar people, grant to every soul faith, fear, patience, peace..."⁴² The question is whether Clement understands election primarily in the corporate Pauline sense or is referring to the divine act predetermining an individual to find salvation in Christ. There is some evidence in favour of the latter alternative, but is insufficient to take a definite stand upon. The thought in his penultimate blessing is in line with Ephesians and I Peter - and shows a definite Pauline trace.

Ignatius, a considerable theologian, mentions election twice. He addresses the Church in Ephesus as "always predestinated before the worlds to glory that it should be elected in true suffering".⁴³ and the Church of the Trallians is referred to as "elect and worthy of God".⁴⁴ Election is used of the Church, being a corporate rather than an individual conception. Here also we have the idea of a pre-ordained Church. This same thought of a pre-existent Church occurs in II Clement in a confused passage where the Church is seen as existing from the beginning as spiritual, and that this spiritual Church was manifested in the flesh of Christ.⁴⁵ Similarly

⁴⁰ Ibid. i:2

⁴¹ Ibid. i:29

⁴² Ibid. i:58

The above quotations from Clement's Epistle are taken from G.S. Faber, The Primitive Doctrine of Election, Pgs. 231-233.

⁴³ J.B. Lightfoot, The Apostolic Fathers, Pg. 105.

⁴⁴ Ibid., Pg. 116.

⁴⁵ Ibid., Pg. 50.

the pre-existent Church is found in Hermas, where the Church is pictured as an old woman because she was created before all things and before the world was formed.⁴⁶ We may safely say, therefore, that evidence points to the idea of a pre-existent and hence pre-ordained Church held during the first half of the second century.⁴⁷

If the writings of the Apostolic Fathers reflect a decline of interest in the election-motif in the theology of the Church, in the latter part of the second century interest almost vanishes. However, in fairness it must be recognised that the principal writers whose works have come down to us from the middle of the century were the Apologists - and the doctrine of election is rarely the mainspring of a defence of the Christian Faith. The emphasis in the Apologists, as we have noted, is upon man's free will; and it is probably through them that the distinction between foreknowledge and foreordination (a distinction unknown to the Hebrew mind) was introduced into Christian theology.⁴⁸ The words of Justin Martyr, converted to the Faith about 130 A.D., are also of interest:

"God has shown that those who have been elected out of every nation are, through Christ, obedient to His counsel"⁴⁹ and then, linking election with calling,

"God has elected us through the like calling that He called Abraham ... through that voice He hath called all of us." ⁵⁰

There is, further, the interesting phrase which occurs in the account of the martyrdom of Polycarp:

"and the whole multitude marvelled that there should be such a difference between the unbelievers and the elect".

Here elect appears to indicate one who is a believer.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Ibid, Pg. 302.

⁴⁷ S.H. Russell, Op. Cit., Pg. 71.

⁴⁸ S.H. Russell, Op. Cit., Pg. 75.

⁴⁹ G. S. Faber, The Primitive Doctrine of Election, Pg. 282.

⁵⁰ Ibid, Pg. 272.

⁵¹ Ibid, Pg. 237.

The writings of Irenaeus bring us into a different atmosphere from that of the Apologists, being primarily polemic directed against the heretic rather than apology to woo the pagan. In this writer the term "predestination" re-appears, though his usage seldom approaches the classical meaning given to the term by Augustine. It is used first in the context of creation: God predestinates all things, forms them as He pleases, gives harmony to all things, and assigns them their place.⁵² Almost as a corollary of this predestination is applied to the Divine plan of salvation. God predetermined all things beforehand with respect to His dispensations to bring man to perfection⁵³; our Lord did everything in the order and time which was foreknown by God.⁵⁴ Sometimes he approaches the classical meaning of the elect, when he says that when the predetermined number is completed those who are enrolled to life shall rise again.⁵⁵ But this is never fully developed and lacks integration in his thought. Moreover, he also preserves a fully libertarian doctrine of the will, because men are plainly the cause themselves of whether they become wheat or chaff.⁵⁶ Irenaeus dwells particularly on the Church and her relation to Israel:

"By the tower of election, everywhere exalted and beautiful, the Lord delivered to other husbandmen...the figurative vineyard, now no longer hedged about but expanded to the whole world".⁵⁷

However, with Irenaeus the idea of predestination is primarily in relation to creation and is never brought into direct relation to the salvation of individuals.

After Tertullian the theme of election almost entirely

⁵² Adv. Haer. II. ii. M.P.G. VII c. 714.

⁵³ Adv. Haer. IV. xxxvii. M.P.G. VII c. 1104.

⁵⁴ Ibid. III. xvi M.P.G. VII c. 926.

⁵⁵ Ibid. II xxxiii M.P.G. VII c. 834.

⁵⁶ Ibid. IV. iv M.P.G. VII c. 983.

⁵⁷ G.S. Faber, The Primitive Doctrine of Election, Pg. 241.

disappears from Western theology for the next hundred and fifty years. One of the primary reasons for this disappearance was the concern of the Western Church with controversies on Church order and the Trinity, while discussions on the nature of grace drifted into the background.

Towards the end of the second century Clement of Alexandria wrote:

"I define the Church to be, not the mere place of assembling, but the general assembly of the elect".⁵⁸

and, further,

"we say that there is only one ancient and catholic Church....those already ordained, whom God has predestinated".⁵⁹

Only Cyprian (258 A.D.) touches on election when he shows that if anyone forsakes his faith he cannot think that "he is elected to a reward of glory", and he shall be punished. "For the Lord elected Judas also among the Apostles: and yet Judas afterward betrayed the Lord".⁶⁰

General Observations on the attitude of the Fathers to Election.

It remains for us now to summarize in some general observations the attitudes adopted to election by Christian writers before Augustine. From the quotations we can see that, a developed doctrine being absent, most of the writers merely allude to it in passing.

We have seen how in the second century the Pauline strand in New Testament teaching on election came to the fore to the total exclusion of the Johannine understanding of the question. In one way the Pauline strand was further developed to include the aspect of the pre-ordained and pre-existent Church. On the other hand, the word "elect" tended to become a synonym for the ordinary, faithful Church-member, and did not imply any idea of individual predetermination. In the Apologists, the

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid. Pg. 242..

60 Ibid. Pg. 243.

idea of election ceases to belong to the content of the Faith itself, but instead is dealt with in a kind of philosophical prolegomena to theological discussion. It merely becomes a matter of divine foreknowledge, having no vital effect upon the work of salvation.⁶¹

There are basically three reasons for the neglect of the Johannine strand of teaching on election in the second century. Firstly, the threat of Gnosticism with its various forms of determinism where men were divided by nature into the three groups of *σαρκικολ*, *ψυχικολ* and *πνευματικολ* caused the Church to emphasise its historic nature as the common society of salvation. The emphasis was laid on historical tradition, while hierarchy in the Catholic Church was primarily related to historical event - succession going back to the Apostles, not to individual spiritual gift or insight. On this ground, any idea of individual predestination was suspect as being destructive of the idea of the Catholic Church, which was the strong bulwark against Gnostic heresies.

Then, the Church in the second century constantly used the moral superiority of the Christians as an argument for the Faith. In some of the Gnostic sects, however, "predestination" and antinomianism were closely allied. The Church therefore had no desire to reinforce Gnostic fatalism by stating that salvation depends entirely upon the predestinating will of God, which all human efforts could not alter.

Thirdly, the chief reason for the neglect of Divine election is the diminishing eschatological expectancy. Election is in fact "inaugurated" eschatology - the recognition that the final Divine purposes are at work in the present. The eschatological community is not over-concerned about commending itself to the world, or protecting its members against heresy, for it

⁶¹ I am grateful to S.H. Russell for certain insights here.

believes itself to be living on the eve of Judgement Day - but just these two activities were the principal concerns of the second century Church. It can in fact be said that predestination only becomes existentially intelligible ~~within the~~ eschatological community.⁶² By the second century the eschatological awareness of the Church had been lost - it had ceased to regard itself as the eschatological community and instead had become the Catholic Church, so that the whole idea of election and predestination had become almost unintelligible.

To sum up we may say that the Fathers did not begin with a decree of God but with the believing experience of the saved. Their main thoughts were that Jesus is the Elect of God, that His election has no other object than the election of the Church, and that the Church lives to bring the world to God.⁶³

Ambrose on Election.

Finally, it is necessary for us to mention Ambrose (A.D. 333), the forerunner of Augustine upon the subject of sin and grace. In a comment on Genesis 16 he notes that:

"the Church of God always existed in predestination....
...but yet, by the will of the Lord, it was reserved
for a certain time..."

There is also his saying about God calling those whom He deigns to call, and making religious whom He will, which was so often quoted by Augustine during the course of the Pelagian controversy and by Calvin in his Institutes. But at the same time Ambrose lays a firm stress upon human responsibility - Christ often comes to the door and knocks, but if He is not allowed to enter, it is our fault not His.⁶⁴ Thus Ambrose holds back from any doctrine of absolute predestination - God wishes all to be His, and it is a man's fault if he is not part of God's people.⁶⁵ Predestination does play a part in his thought; he

⁶² S.H. Russell, Op. Cit. Pg. 79.

⁶³ A.S. Martin, Op. Cit., Pg. 259.

⁶⁴ Expos. Ps. 118. xii. 13. XV. c. 1436.

⁶⁵ In a comment on Ps. 39.

can say that both the Church and the saints were fore-ordained before the world began⁶⁶, but he also says that predestination is according to foreseen merit.⁶⁷

Conclusion.

Our study of the discussion on election or predestination before the time of Augustine therefore leads us to the conclusion that there was no fixed doctrine generally accepted by the Church at large. In fact, it is obvious that there was much misunderstanding and a groping towards the truth - it was left to Augustine to attempt a systematic formulation of the doctrine of election. This we shall have to examine in the following chapter.

⁶⁶ De Fide Christiana III. x. 64. XVI. c. 627.

⁶⁷ Ibid. V. vi. 83. XVI. p. 665.

CHAPTER TWO.

ST. AUGUSTINE ON ELECTION.

Calvin, primarily a biblical expositor, regarded Scripture as his ultimate and decisive authority for matters of faith. Election and reprobation were to him a definite part of God's revelation in Scripture. His mind, however, had received a strong bias on these from St. Augustine's writings (A.D. 354 - 430).¹ A rapid comparison with Augustine's Anti-Pelagian writings is enough to show that Calvin reproduces in large measure his arguments, the only considerable difference being that Calvin lays greater stress on reprobation. An examination of relevant sections of the Institutes and the Consensus Genevensis, De aeterna Dei praedestinatione (1552), where Calvin maintains that God has chosen some men to salvation and left others to their destruction, reveals that Augustine is his main reference and authority among the Fathers.

Augustine, the first to treat the Doctrine of Predestination Seriously.

Having considered briefly some statements on election prior to Augustine by leading exponents of the Christian Faith we are justified in agreeing with Brunner's blunt statement that "before Augustine there was no doctrine of predestination".² From Augustine onwards the doctrines of predestination, irresistible grace and the perseverance of the saints appear time and again in the attempts of theologians to understand the relation between the sovereignty of God and the free-will of man. Latourette's assertion that no other Christian thinker after Paul has so profoundly influenced the Christianity of Western Europe both in its Protestant and Catholic forms is clearly

¹ Inst. 2.3.8 "...I think it not out of place to show my accordance with a man whose authority is justly of so much weight in the Christian world".

² E. Brunner, The Christian Doctrine of God, Vol. I, Pg. 340. cf. also L. Berkhof, Systematic Theology, Pg. 109.

illustrated in the controversies on grace and free-will in the Church, where Augustine's name is constantly invoked and his writings repeatedly quoted.³

With Augustine predestination assumed new prominence since his doctrine had little historical background,⁴ being a new creation drawn not from earlier Christian sources exclusively; he was influenced basically by four different sources, namely, a study of the Epistle to the Romans, his own personal experience of conversion, the strong influence of Ambrose, Bishop of Milan ("an Augustine before Augustine")⁵, and the ideas which he imbibed from his philosophic studies. His doctrine must be seen as arising within the context of a deep sense of moral failure and absolute dependence on the grace of God for salvation, so that in the last resort it is a religious rather than a philosophic doctrine.⁶

The Influence of Platonism.

Augustine for a time taught simple prescience⁷ but after deeper reflection and progress in the knowledge of the Scripture (esp. the Epistle to the Romans) he not only retracted it as false but powerfully confuted it. It is usual to attribute the libertarian elements in his earlier thought to Platonism;⁸ and though there is probably considerable truth in this, it is not necessarily so. There is also a deterministic strain in Platonism which becomes prominent when that philosophic strain comes into contact with Stoicism and it can be detected in such a thinker as Clement of Alexandria. This strain is not

³ K.S. Latourette, A History of Christianity, Pg. 174.

⁴ A.S. Martin in an article on "Election" in the Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, Vol. 5, Pg. 260.

⁵ R. Seeberg, The History of Doctrines, Pg. 308.

⁶ H. Bettenson, Documents of the Christian Church, Pg. 81.

⁷ G.C. Berkouwer, Divine Election, Pg. 36.

⁸ Essay by D.E. Roberts on The Earliest Writings, Pg.124, in A Companion to the Study of St. Augustine by R.W. Battenhouse.

entirely absent from the earlier thought of Augustine; in the Soliloquies he speaks of Wisdom allowing herself to be embraced by only "a very few chosen lovers".⁹

His early Teaching on Man.

The first early treatise of Augustine relevant to our discussion is De Libero Arbitrio, which may be regarded as the best exposition of what may be called the peculiarly Augustinian brand of Neo-platonism written against the Manichees to explain the nature and origin of evil. The Pelagians later maintained, with some justification, that his position in this work conformed with their views; but this was denied by Augustine in his Retractiones (i.9).

Toward the end of the book his main concern is to show that because man is free, he can turn either toward salvation or toward reprobation. In other words, man can choose to come under the control of either God or the devil. His whole interpretation rests on the assumption that man always "can" do what he "ought" to do. Man has no right to claim that God has failed to supply him with sufficient strength to resist temptation, for God has given him a free will, and nothing can lead him into sin against his will. When the question arises about what causes the will to choose either the right or the wrong, Augustine replies that the question lands in an infinite regress and refuses to go back further, seeking some cause of an evil will anterior to the will itself.¹⁰

In the Retractiones Augustine is able to point out that he makes little mention of the grace of God in this book because his primary concern at the time was to affirm human responsibility against a form of necessitarianism which denied it. He adds that De Libero Arbitrio is devoted largely to a description

⁹ Ed. J.H. Burleigh, Augustine: Earlier Writings, Pg. 37.

¹⁰ I am grateful to S.H. Russell for the above comments.

of the gift which man received from God before the Fall. Clearly, however, the work also describes freedom after the Fall, in terms which are incompatible with Augustine's later position; for he states that even after the Fall men can move toward salvation by making the moral effort involved in following Christ as an example.¹¹

While we can detect a great difference of tone, interest, and attitude from those of his maturer writings, we can also detect some of the ideas which were later developed in his mature thought. We find some use of "occulta justitia" (hidden justice), the view that mankind is in the state of penal affliction, and the all-pervading emphasis that God's will cannot be thwarted.

A strong emphasis, however, on man's free-will is found in the rest of the anti-Manichaen works, where Augustine seeks to argue that a soul evil by nature could not possibly commit sin. Arguing forcibly, he insists that a person can only be held responsible for actions from which he could abstain:

"Sin takes place only by exercise of the will....no one compelling..."¹²

"Sin is the will to retain and follow after what justice forbids, and from which it is free to abstain".¹³

The will is defined in the same work as follows:

"....a movement of the soul unforced by anyone, to gain something or not to lose something...."¹⁴,

a definition which according to the Retractiones refers only to the will of the unfallen Adam.¹⁵ Though we may suspect that this comment is but a retrojection of Augustine's later thinking, nevertheless the idea that mankind lost its free-will in the fullest sense of the word in the fall of Adam also occurs in

¹¹ D.E. Roberts, Ibid, Pg. 123.

¹² De Duabus Animabus, contra Manichaeos, x.14.42. c. 104.

¹³ Ibid, xi. 15.

¹⁴ Ibid, x.14.42. c. 104.

¹⁵ Retractiones, I. xiv, 4. pp. 74-75.

these early anti-Manichaen writings:

"I say that there was free-will in that man who was first created, that nothing at all could resist his will so long as he wished to keep God's commandment. But after he sinned by free-will, we who are descended from his stock are cast down into necessity".¹⁶

It is from this period too that one of his most graphic descriptions of original sin appears: after describing the force of custom on men's lives, he goes on to say:

"and this is why we fight against the soul, namely from our habit of living in the flesh..."¹⁷

What is important in these works is that his later key-ideas are there already: original sin, and the view that human free-will was lost in the fall of Adam.

Further, in another work of this period we find him groping towards an understanding of predestination. His thought is more severe here than in earlier writings for the phrase "massa peccati" ("clay of sin" - clearly a reference to the Potter and clay in Rom. 9) is used concerning human nature which fell in Adam, and it is argued that no member of this "massa" to whom only damnation is owing has a right to reply against God.¹⁸

In these early works one has the feeling that Augustine's thought is tentative; he is aware of the problems raised by the biblical statements concerning the operation of grace and is trying various lines of approach to solve them. The impression given is that logically his thought is moving towards an absolute predestination via his views on man.

Ideas on Election fixed by A.D. 397:

It is commonly believed that Augustine's predestinarian views grew out of controversy with Pelagius but a simple acceptance of this is not possible. In De Diversis Quaestionibus ad Simplicianum (397 A.D.), written almost fifteen years before the

¹⁶ Acts seu disputatio contra Fortunatum Manichaen xxii.XLII
c. 124.

¹⁷ Ibid. xxii. XLII c.125.

¹⁸ De Diversis Quaestionibus Octoginta Tribus, lxviii.3.XL.c.71.

start of the Pelagian controversy, we have the mature Augustinian position in outline on grace and election. Halfway through the second "Quaestio" his argument develops into a forthright exposition of the mature Augustinian teaching on grace. He shows, when dealing with Romans 9:10-29, that there is no conceivable reason why Esau should not be elected while Jacob was. The text forbids us to think that Jacob was elected because God foresaw his future works, while to say that he was elected because of his foreseen faith is equally useless, because if God elects on account of foreseen faith, He could equally elect because of foreseen works.¹⁹ Augustine proceeds to argue that faith cannot be regarded as a merit, because it is impossible to believe unless one has first been called.²⁰ Nevertheless, faith itself is a gift from God - and here Augustine for the first time uses to full effect the text which played such a large part in his thinking concerning grace: "What hast thou that thou hast not received?" (I Cor. 4:7).²¹ Esau was not rejected because he was unwilling to accept God's call: he was rejected before he was able to will or not.²² Proceeding in his rather devious argument, Augustine quotes Phil.2:12-13, and concludes:

"Because except by His help we cannot attain what we want, in the same way except by His call we do not desire it".²³

The Pelagian Controversy.

There is no real development in Augustinian thought on grace throughout the Pelagian controversy, for the various treatises written in this period are but adaptations of thoughts

¹⁹ De Div. Quaest. ad. Simplic. I.ii.5. XL c. 114.

²⁰ Ibid, I.ii.7. XL.c.115.

²¹ Ibid, I.ii.9. XL.c.116.

²² Ibid, I.ii.10.XL.c.117.

²³ Ibid, I.ii.12.XL.c.118.

which appear in the work quoted above.²⁴ During this controversy Augustine merely re-orientated his beliefs on grace so as to fit them into an all-embracing pattern of the Divine sovereignty which the biblical witness and his own personal experience compelled him to accept.

One scholar remarks that Augustine was no match for Pelagius in their argument so that he was driven from one exaggeration to another. In the difficult doctrine of predestination, he maintains, the fact of God's election of individuals to receive the gift of grace was twisted into a conclusion that by a similar act the gift was refused to many for whom it was desired, while the proposition that fallen man cannot do without the help of grace to fulfil the purpose of God was stretched to mean that he cannot do anything well-pleasing to God.²⁵ This remark is correct in noting that in the heat of the argument Augustine was driven to extremes, but basically his doctrines did not change from those laid down previous to the controversy.

From what we have stated, it will be obvious that to understand Augustine's doctrine of predestination, we must see it against the background of his understanding of original sin.²⁶

His Mature Teaching on Original Sin:

In the treatise De Correptione Gratia Augustine makes it clear that man's original capacities included both the power not to sin and the power to sin (*posse non peccare et posse peccare*). In Adam's original sin, man lost the *posse non peccare* (the power not to sin) and retained the *posse peccare* (the power to sin), which he continues to exercise.²⁷ The

²⁴ Principally fifteen in number of which the following are the most important: De Correptione Gratia (427),
De Praedestinatione Sanctorum (428)
De Dono Perseverantiae (429)

²⁵ Art. on St. Augustine in Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol. 2. Pg. 685

²⁶ J. B. Mozley, The Augustinian Doctrine of Predestination, Pg. 46.

²⁷ S. B. Babbage, Man in Nature and Grace, Pg. 41.

human will be viewed as completely impotent since the Fall, so that the power of spiritual good is lost and man wills nothing but evil. In Adam the whole human race has become "a mass of perdition" and is condemned in him:

"For all men were thus seminally in the loins of Adam when he was condemned and therefore he was not condemned without them".²⁸

The whole race shares his guilt, because it was already in existence potentially in him, so that it really sinned when he sinned.²⁹ For Augustine the fallen will of man can no longer produce anything but evil, and always does so; but prior to the commission of these free acts of sin for which he is guilty, man is guilty from birth through "original sin".

His View of Grace:

It is clear on this view of the Fall that Augustine must attribute the salvation of men to grace alone, which he conceives of as the resistless and creative power of God in human life.³⁰ Grace, being irresistible, is characterised by Augustine as predestinating grace. Grace heals and restores the free will, so that it is able to freely choose the good.³¹ In his world-view the supremacy of grace combines with his neo-Platonism to produce a deterministic cosmology. In fact, God cannot be thought of as doing anything fresh; when He appears to act suddenly, He is only bringing about what is certain to happen because of its fore-ordination in His eternal counsels. The events of history are so absolutely determined for Augustine that in commenting on the 41st Psalm he speaks of future events as in the past, so certain is he of their absolute certainty.

²⁸ R. Seeberg, The History of Doctrines, Pg. 343.

²⁹ J.F. Bethune-Baker, The Early History of Christian Doctrine, Pg. 309.

³⁰ J.D.Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines, Pg. 366.
Kelly asserts that for Augustine this power of grace is in effect the presence of the Holy Spirit, for whom his favourite description is "donum".

³¹ R. Seeberg, Op. Cit., Pg. 350.

The Two Acts of God:

There is a strict number whom God has fore-ordained to grace and to eternal life: "there is a number so fixed, that neither can anyone be added to them nor taken from them".³² The fixity of the number is also evident from Augustine's view that the elect are to form a substitution for the number of the fallen angels.³³ Accordingly, the elect are few in comparison with the non-elect (a doctrine attributed to Scripture and confirmed by observation).³⁴ Election is not grounded on the foreknowledge of human faith or conduct: no account is given of why some are elected and others not. There must be two classes to manifest the divine mercy and justice,

"over the mass of corruption there passed two acts of the will of God: an act of favour and grace, choosing part to be partakers of everlasting glory, and an act of justice, forsaking the rest and adjudging them to endless perdition".³⁵

To the question why God chooses some and leaves others to their fate the only answer is: "I so will", at which the creature must bow before the Creator. Constantly Augustine is brought to a confession of human ignorance, that the divine counsels are inscrutable; but he is very far from admitting anything arbitrary or unjust in the methods and acts of God. All are the outcome of justice, love, and wisdom, and are governed by the eternal purpose of good. Yet how predestination is consistent with the eternal love of God he does not expressly attempt to show.³⁶ Or as Mozley has said:

"St. Augustine regarded predestination as a perplexing mystery - a doctrine which disagreed with our natural ideas of God's justice, and which could only be defended by reference to His inscrutable and sovereign will".³⁷

³² De Correptione Gratia xiii. 39.

³³ Enchiridion ix. 29 ; xvi. 61.

³⁴ Ibid., xxvi. 97.

³⁵ A.S. Martin, Op. Cit., Pg. 260.

³⁶ J.F. Bethune-Baker, Op. Cit., Pg. 312.

³⁷ J.B. Mozley, Op. Cit., Pg. 134.

Later in our study we shall see how Calvin reasons on exactly the same lines as Augustine, constantly having to refer predestination to the inscrutable will of God.

Double Predestination:

The question then arises whether Augustine taught definitely a doctrine of double predestination. Phrases such as "predestinated to eternal death" or "punishment" are far too common in his works to allow us to think that he did not do so.³⁸ At the same time, there is evidence that he was not absolutely thoroughgoing in his double predestinarianism. For example, he states that though God foreknew that Adam should fall, this knowledge did not determine his falling.³⁹ But he also notes that Adam did not receive from God the gift of perseverance in goodness, since his own free-will was sufficiently strong to determine whether he should persevere or not.⁴⁰ With all other men, however, it is very different; for they are born in the toils of original sin and therefore need the certain and determined grace of God to persevere in goodness.⁴¹ The Augustinian position may be expressed as follows: Adam only was pre-determined to freedom, though it was foreknown by God that he would use this freedom badly to turn to evil; men who are born "in Adam" lack, however, their ancestor's freedom and can only be saved by the certainly efficacious grace of God. The eternal destiny of individual human beings is determined by whether God is willing to impart to them this grace or not. If God chooses not to grant this grace to an individual he remains "in Adam" and is certain not to be saved. It may be argued that this means God does not determine that a man should be

³⁸ De Civ. Dei. xxi. 24 and xxii. 24; De Anima et eius Origine IV. xi, 16 ; De Perf. Iustitiae Hominis, xiii. 31. En. in Ps. lx. 24 ; Enchir. c. 26 XL.

³⁹ De Correptione Gratia. xii. 37. XLIV. c. 939.

⁴⁰ Ibid., xii. 37. XLIV. c. 938-9.

⁴¹ Ibid., xii. 35-36. XLIV. c. 937-8.

finally lost, as He does not will his damnation, but only leaves him as he is. Augustine does speak of preterition and dereliction (passing by and abandonment), but from his choice of language it does not appear that he made any significant difference between this and double predestination. All that may be maintained of this is that we cannot view Augustine as a thoroughgoing supralapsarian (refer Pgs. 71 and 107 for elucidation of this term); Adam at least was not predestinated to eternal death.⁴²

The Forerunner of Supralapsarianism:

In his ambiguous terminology lie the seed of what is called the "supralapsarian" position, viz., that reprobation is an act of God's sovereignty. Augustine does not view the decree of predestination as preceding both original and actual sin (the supralapsarian position), neither does he place the decree of election and reprobation after these (the Pelagian position). For him original sin alone logically precedes predestination. Nevertheless, although original sin is the sufficient ground of reprobation, Augustine does not see it as the final and deepest ground (later Calvin was to follow Augustine at this point). According to him, God's sovereignty as expressed in Romans 9:18 ("so then He hath mercy on whom He will and whom He will He hardeneth") is the only answer to the question why God rejects some and chooses others.⁴³ Augustine does not directly deduce a decree establishing the means unto perdition from a decree of reprobation as such. He generally views reprobation negatively, that is, as preterition, and not as a rule part of predestination; but he identifies predestination with election and subsumes both election and reprobation under God's providence.

⁴² I am indebted to S.H. Russell for a number of insights on "double predestination" in Augustine.

⁴³ H. Bavinck, The Doctrine of God, Pg. 360.

His "Definition" of Predestination.

In his work "De dono Perseverantiae"(428), he expresses the positive value of divine election:

"This, and nothing but this, is the predestination of the saints; namely, the foreknowledge and planning of God's kindnesses, by which they are most surely delivered, whoever are delivered".

Here we also notice his close affinity with the Hebrew mind, as his emphasis on the sole causality of God makes him unable to see any significant difference between foreknowledge and predestination. In fact, as we see above, predestination is nothing else than God's foreknowledge of those He chooses to deliver.

Predestination and Perseverance:

Also among the predestinated are those who as yet do not believe and even those who are yet unborn, but their number is fixed and immutable. It must therefore be held on his view that one may not come into contact with historic Christianity and yet still be saved, because he is predestinated.⁴⁴ Though God's predestination is certain and sure in its effect, there are those who are baptised and adhere to the Church for a time, and yet do not endure to the end. In some sense these people must be regarded as elected, yet from the Divine point of view they cannot be so.⁴⁵ In fact, no one in this life can be sure whether he is elect or not - a state necessary to avoid human presumption.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, this "gift of perseverance" once given cannot be lost, because those to whom God grants to endure to the end cannot do anything else.⁴⁷ One can only know whether he is elect from this: whether he perseveres unto the end. But while no one may presume to include himself in the number of the

⁴⁴ R. Seeberg, Op. Cit., Pg. 352.

⁴⁵ De Correctione Gratia. vii. 16. XLIV. c.925.

⁴⁶ Ibid., xiii, 40. XLIV. c.940-1.

⁴⁷ De Don. Pers. vi. 10. XLV. c. 999.

elect it is undoubtedly true of those who actually belong to it that

"their faith....certainly does not fail, or, if there are some whose faith fails, it is repaired before this life is finished...."⁴⁸ and

"...if any one of these (the elect) perishes God is cheated: but none of them perishes, because God is not cheated..."⁴⁹.

The Order of Decrees:

Basically, then, Augustine viewed the order in the elements of God's counsel as follows:

- a. a decree to create man and to permit him to fall.
- b. a decree to elect some out of this corrupt mass unto eternal life, and to allow others to remain in the corruption in which they have involved themselves.
- c. a decree determining the means to effect the end in view.

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Predestination and Christ:

The most important aspect of Augustine's doctrine is its Christological orientation. Reference to the work of Christ is not missing from the specifically anti-Pelagian treatises though in these it is scarcely any more than an echo of Ephesians I:4.⁵¹ Whatever may be said about the office of Christ in predestination, there is not the slightest doubt that grace is always connected by Augustine with His work - even the Old Testament saints were only saved because they lived by Christ's aiding grace.⁵²

The most important references to the predestinating work of Christ are found in De Praedestinatione Sanctorum XV. It is necessary to quote briefly from that work to see how Augustine linked Christ with predestination:

⁴⁸ Ibid., ix. 23.

⁴⁹ Ibid., vii. 16.

⁵⁰ H. Bavinck, Op. Cit., Pg. 360.

⁵¹ De Correptione Gratia, vii. 13. XLIV. c. 924.

⁵² De Pecc. Mer. et Rem. I.xi.13, XLIV. c.116.

"the most splendid example of predestination and grace is the Saviour Himself..."

Then speaking of the relationship of believers to Christ in His predestination:

"This then is the predestination of the saints which is most clearly understood in the saint of saints. Who rightly understanding the words of truth can deny it? For we learn then that, in so far as he was Man, the Lord of Glory was predestinated Himself - predestinated to be the Son of God...."

and further,

"As then that one Man was predestinated to be our Head, so are we many predestinated to be His members"

Augustine expressed himself to the same effect in De Dono Perseverantiae XXIV:

"there is no more illustrious example of predestination than Jesus Himself, the Mediator Himself. Whoever being a believer would rightly understand it, let him look upon Him".

and LVII

"God therefore predestinated both Him and us: Him that He should be our Head and us that we should be His Body..."

On closer examination, however, these passages are not as promising for a Christological approach to the doctrine of predestination as they at first appear. In the first work the main point of his argument is that our predestination is an effect of the same free-working grace, as that by which the manhood of Christ was assumed. In fact, the passages shed no real light on the predestinating work of Christ, but is concerned mainly with the predestinating of His manhood. The argument in the second work is similar; Augustine does not inform us that our predestination is included in that of our Head, but rather suggests that it is similar in kind to that of our Lord, rooted in the same gracious purpose.

Augustine's basic emphasis appears to be upon the simultaneity of our predestination and of our Lord's humanity, not that our election is integrally included in that of Christ. Thus we see that the root meaning of the phrase "he chose us in Christ" to Augustine is exemplaristic rather than realistic.

It is therefore worth noting Reuter's comment here that Augustine's formula when speaking of grace and the work of Christ together is most frequently "grace through Christ", then "grace because of Christ", and finally least frequently "grace in Christ".⁵³ Christ in His earthly ministry is the agent of, rather than the source of predestinating grace, though He is aware that His saving work will avail only for the elect.⁵⁴

Criticism of Augustine's Views:

Finally, we must conclude our discussion with certain criticisms of Augustine's teaching on election. Two present day theologians have viewed Augustine in a different light. Brunner has criticised him for his treatment of election apart from Christ,⁵⁵ while Barth finds in him traces of a Christocentric approach to the problem.⁵⁶ Brunner considers Augustine's great achievement to be the rediscovery of the biblical "sole gratia", this being the reason why Calvin adhered so closely to his teaching.

Augustine was obviously not so much concerned about the gracious action of God in Jesus Christ as he was in the transformation of a man in bondage to sin into a free man by the working of grace. Closely connected to this is his misunderstanding of the New Testament teaching on "justification" which he interpreted as the endowing with a new moral power.⁵⁷ From this transformation (that is, from an experimental basis) he proceeded to argue back in terms of causality. If this transformation is really owing to grace alone then it must be traced back to its eternal origin, the divine choice. The election is no longer a state of "being-elect-in-Christ" through faith:

⁵³ H. Reuter, Augustinische Studien, pg. 52.

⁵⁴ Trac. in Ioan. xl. 2. XXXV. c. 1686.

⁵⁵ E. Brunner, Op. Cit., Pg. 340.

⁵⁶ K. Barth, Church Dogmatics, Vol.2, Pt. 2, Pg. 118.

⁵⁷ R. Seeberg, Op. Cit., Pg. 348.

but it is the pre-temporal act of God to which the causal consideration of the divine work of grace in the human soul leads. Election is wholly severed from the revelation in Christ, for it is a metaphysical postulate which results from the causal consideration of the experience of grace. The great gulf in Augustine's thought, between faith in Christ and election, is displayed clearly in that "faith" does not necessarily imply the certainty of election and salvation:

"For who out of the multitude of the faithful, seeing that he lives under this mortality would presume himself to be among the number of the predestinated?" 58

Thus election is not that which one accepts in Christ, but it is a metaphysical "X" to which the causal consideration of grace in the abstract leads.

Augustine was obviously endued with the profound conviction that the salvation of men is wholly the work of God and that they themselves contribute nothing towards it. As one of his favourite texts reads, "it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy" (Rom. 9.16). His fault, later aggravated by Calvin, was that he traced the sovereignty of grace to the sovereignty of an inscrutable will, which was then absolutised and made the basis of a double predestination. But this absolute and inscrutable will is not the will of God as it is revealed in His act of grace in Christ.⁵⁹ This double predestination was further advanced by the fact, which he felt sure was proved by the evidence of Scripture, that there will be two kinds of persons at the Judgement, those who will be saved and those who will be condemned; from this he looked back to the divine causality and then drew his conclusions. This, of course, resulted in speculation: as Brunner has rightly said, "natural theology on the basis of a statement

58 E. Brunner, Op. Cit., Pg. 341.

59 G.S. Hendry, The Westminster Confession for Today, Pg. 55.

which has a biblical core".⁶⁰

Further, a difficulty is revealed in that Augustine gives no consistent teaching on how individuals may be considered responsible for their personal sins. He sees the problem, yet he gives no clear guidance upon how it may be solved. This was later also to be part of Calvin's dilemma. If men have lost their free-will through the Fall of Adam, they cannot be held responsible for any further sins they might commit. If Augustine had examined the problem sufficiently (and this applies to Calvin as well) he would have found only two alternatives left to him, if he was to preserve human responsibility for individual wrongdoing: he could have affirmed a residual freedom left to man after the Fall - a course which would have led to a semi-Pelagian position, or he could have affirmed even for the unregenerate man a new created freedom in Christ.

Scripture informs us of God's election but makes no consistent statement of it. Augustine, however, erects those passages of Scripture suggestive of predestination into a definite and absolute system so that he is occasionally embarrassed when meeting portions which do not fit into his doctrinal scheme. His is the error of those who follow without due consideration the strong impression the human mind entertains that there must be definite and final truth to be arrived at on any question of Scripture under discussion. But this is to do an injustice to the many-sidedness of Scripture and to overstep the bounds of revelation. Part of his difficulty appears to arise from a conception of God greatly influenced by neo-Platonism, so that his view of God as absolute Subsistence prevented him from being thoroughly Christocentric in his treatment of predestination. In fact he never really attempted to inter-relate his doctrine of grace with his Christology.

⁶⁰ E. Brunner, Op. Cit., Pg. 350.

Failing to see that election arises out of the divine Love, he was forced to seek refuge in the fact of mystery when attempting to give an adequate explanation of the origin of election. He is therefore forced to look for God's ultimate reasons for His different acts (election and preterition) in a sphere inaccessible to human understanding. His most profound mistake has been his failure in his analysis of the divine nature. As Shaw reminds us,

"what is new and distinctive in Jesus' view of the Fatherhood of God is that Fatherhood is not merely one quality among others; it is the central determining attribute in whose service all other attributes of Godhead are exercised".⁶¹

⁶¹ J.M. Shaw, The Christian Gospel of the Fatherhood of God,
Pg. 9.

CHAPTER THREE.

INTRODUCTION TO CALVIN'S DOCTRINE OF ELECTION.[⌘]

We have already noted in passing that in the popular religious mind Calvin is looked upon as the theologian of predestination, although an historical appreciation will show us that the doctrine of predestination has a perfectly just claim to be a rightful and dominant part of the orthodox Western Christian tradition, both in its Catholic and Protestant branches. Is Calvin regarded in this way by popular thought because predestination is considered to be the corner stone of his theological edifice?

The Place the Doctrine of Predestination held in his Theology.

A cursory acquaintance with his writings shows that this doctrine occupies an integral and vital place in his system, but the view that the doctrine is central and determinative in his whole theological system cannot be upheld.¹ Notable historians of the doctrine have taken the view that this particular doctrine is the foundation of Calvin's thought from Alexander Sweitzer to O. Ritschl; while equally important theologians such as A. Ritschl have seen it occupying a peripheral place.² But these opinions err by viewing Calvin through twentieth century spectacles and thereby misunderstanding his whole theological method. No theologian before Schleiermacher ever consciously seized on a single principle from which to deduce his whole theological structure. Doumergue, while he holds that the doctrine is the foundation of Calvin's theology, nevertheless states that the doctrine is not exclusively Calvinian, but is to be seen as the dogma par excellence of the Reformation.³ This we may accept as a

[⌘]In this chapter I have made extensive use of Doumergue, Jean Calvin, Vol. 4, Book 7, Chapters 1 and 3.

¹A.M. Hunter, The Teaching of Calvin, Pg. 94.

²I have gained some valuable insights here from the thesis by S.H. Russell. Cf. W. Niesel, The Theology of Calvin, Pgs. 15 & 159 where he cites a number of single principles which have been seized upon in an attempt to interpret Calvin's theology.

³Doumergue. Jean Calvin, Vol. 4, P.407.

true judgement as long as the dogma is not regarded as being the explicit doctrine upon which all Reformation theology is built.

Instead of attempting to interpret his theology from the narrow basis of a single doctrine, we should rather admit that his great work, The Institutes of the Christian Religion, is in intention a theology of the Gospel and that the "essence" of the Gospel for Calvin, as for all the Reformers (and Paul before them), was the doctrine of justification by faith. It is no surprise, therefore, to find that this topic stands at the centre (spatially, as well as theologically) of Calvin's work.⁴ Further, we have the important insight of Warfield that

"the fundamental interest of Calvin as a theologian lay in the region broadly designated soteriological his interest was most intense in the application to the sinful soul of the salvation wrought out by Christ".⁵

In a brief epistle to the reader prefixed to the Second edition of the Institutio,⁶ published at Strasburg in 1539, Calvin indicates that the aim of the revision has been to produce a textbook serviceable in "the preparation of candidates in theology for the reading of the Divine Word".⁷ In the preface of the French edition of 1545, Calvin reveals his intention to assist his readers in "finding the sum of what God has been pleased to teach us in His Word".⁸ The structure of the final edition of the Institutio (1559) shows that Calvin consciously built upon the framework of the Apostles Creed in an attempt to expound the Christian Faith, while the doctrine of Election

⁴ From an article by Dr. J.I.Packer, Calvin the Theologian, in the International Reformed Bulletin, Oct. 1959.

⁵ B.B. Warfield, Calvin and Augustine, Pg.434.

⁶ It is worth remembering that the full title of the first edition was "Instruction in the Christian Religion, containing almost the whole sum of godliness and all that needs to be known in the doctrine of salvation: a work most worthy of perusal by all who aspire to godliness".

⁷ John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, 2nd. Edition 1539.

⁸ Ibid, (French edition. 1545).

is not explicitly dealt with until the fourth book. Numerous writers of our generation have stressed the paradoxical character of much of Calvin's thought (cf. T.F. Torrance), and McNeill's words that --

"it is a superficial judgement that regards him as a resolute systematiser whose ideas are wholly unambiguous and consistent and set in a flawless mould"⁹ - are being vindicated by recent studies of Calvin's theology by Reformed scholars. The attempt to make any one doctrine basic to Calvin's theology is condemned by the varying forms of the different editions of the Institutio, which plainly reveal that he had no idea that he was writing his theology around any architectonic principle.

The Importance Calvin gave to Predestination in Various Writings.

In the first edition of the Institutes (1536), modelled on the typical medieval books for the instruction of the laity, the essential fact is that the doctrine of predestination is referred to but not treated fully by itself: it appears accidentally in three or four passages having no essential connection with each other.

The first passage deals with predestination in relation to good works and merit:

"We are heirs of the heavenly kingdom by the grace of God and not by our own means. This is the foundation of our salvation laid by St. Paul and this is predestination. In Christ we have been elected from eternity before the foundation of the world without any merit on our part but according to the design and good will of God. We have thus been grafted in Christ and by this insertion we have everything in Him and nothing in ourselves".¹⁰

The second and most important passage for our purpose deals with predestination in relation to the Church:

"The Church is the assembly of the elect. This election took place by an act of the goodness of God before the foundation of the world and it took place in Christ so that Christ is the Head of the elect. Some of those who appear to be elect do not persevere, but those who are truly elect cannot be lost. Their salvation is so

⁹ J.T. McNeill, The History and Character of Calvinism, Pg.201.

¹⁰ Calvini Opera Omnia, Vol. 1, Pg. 51.

certain and so assured that they cannot be shaken even though the whole world should fall in ruins, for the election of God can no more than the eternal wisdom vary nor be at fault. The elect can ~~v~~ascillate and fluctuate, they can even fall, but they are not destroyed".¹¹

The third passage deals with the doctrine in relation to Providence and the Sovereignty of God:

"God the Creator who by His omnipotence does all in all and by His providence directs all, from whom comes all that happens to us, joy and sadness, prosperity and adversity, and all except sin; and all this not because of some merit but by a paternal goodwill whose sole cause is kindness".¹²

We have quoted the passages in full to show that Calvin's doctrine was fixed in essence in 1536. Like the rest of the major doctrines of the Institutes he did not have occasion to alter the doctrine of predestination considerably in the later editions. These were merely an enlargement of his earlier thought and consistent with the passages quoted above. It is clear that the idea of predestination does not appear in the first edition in the centre or in the foreground, but it appears complete with its three constitutive elements: the negation of merit, the certitude of salvation, and the sovereignty of God. The dominating feature here is the sovereignty of God which embraces the other two elements. An emphasis not always given adequate recognition is found in the words of the first passage, "In Christ we have been elected from eternity ..." and in the second passage "This election took place in Christ, so that Christ is the Head of the elect". At this point we stand at the very centre of Calvin's doctrine of election. God's sovereign freedom and the profundity of election do not mean for Calvin that there is no "revelatio", no way to the knowledge of salvation and of God's election.¹³

¹¹ Ibid, Pg. 73.

¹² Ibid, Pg. 63.

¹³ G.C. Berkouwer, The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth, Pg. 285.

From the beginning he starts with the fact of grace, for he is particularly fond of the idea that Christ is the sphere of our election, the way to the certainty of election. However, we shall have occasion at a later stage to examine his Christological basis to predestination.

His first formal exposition of predestination, under its own separate caption, occurs not in the Institutes but in the earliest of his confessional writings, The Instruction and Confession of Faith in use in the Church of Geneva, published in April, 1537.¹⁴ Calvin comes against the fact that the Word of the Gospel calls all men, but some despise this grace while others receive it. The only answer to this lies in the great secret of the counsel of God, for the seed of the Word of God takes root and brings forth fruit only in those whom the Lord by His eternal election has predestined as His children and heirs of the heavenly kingdom. To all the others who by the same counsel of God are reprobated before the foundation of the world, the clear and evident preaching of the truth can be nothing less than "an odour of death in death".¹⁵ Thus we observe that the first direct solution of the doctrine which we have from Calvin is an "a posteriori" development. He starts with the fact of those who hear the Gospel with open hostility or without any result at all. How is this to be explained? Why do some men not even hear the Gospel? Calvin sees that this terrible and mysterious fact proves that faith is not a merit but a gift from God. To answer these questions the Scriptures are consulted (although really only in a secondary capacity), and it is shown that some are elected by God and others rejected. But as Barth has rightly asked: Is it

¹⁴B.B. Warfield in the article Predestination in the Reformed Confessions in Studies in Theology, Pg. 133.

¹⁵Opera Omnia 22, Pg. 46.

correct to go to the Bible with a question dictated to us by experience, i.e., with a presupposition which has only an empirical basis, in order then to understand the statements of the Bible as an answer to this question?¹⁶ Dealing with such delicate doctrines as election and reprobation, Scripture must not simply be brought in as an interpretation of the facts as given by our own judgement. The very facts which Calvin should have emphasised were those which were not in the realm of experience, but in Scripture as the self-revelation of God. Although he did not make the experience in question the basis of his doctrine, he did buttress it so emphatically by what he experienced in preaching and observation that its purity was seriously undermined. Later this was particularly so in the work De Aeterna Dei praedestinatione (1552) in which there is constant appeal to the "convincere" or "docere" or "demonstrare" of "experientia", whenever the question arises of the basis of the assertion that from the very first men stand in a different relationship to the Gospel: a difference which, it appears to him, can only be explained by a difference in the divine decree made concerning them.

(We may notice that in the final edition of the Institutes in 1559 there is still a strong tendency to reinforce the doctrine from experience. Indeed, the whole exposition begins with the methodologically only too revealing words: "The covenant of life is not preached equally to all and among those to whom it is preached, it does not always meet with the same reception. This diversity displays the unsearchable depth of the divine judgement, and is without doubt subordinate to God's purpose of eternal election".¹⁷ Then Calvin speaks about "a hundred to whom the same discourse is delivered, twenty, perhaps, receive it with the prompt obedience of faith; the others set no value upon it, or deride or spurn or abominate it". He reads this back into Paul's words in I Cor. 4:7, "What makes thee to differ?" indicating that the reason for this difference is "the favour of God".¹⁸)

¹⁶For a sharp criticism of Calvin's method see Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics, The Doctrine of God, Vol.2 Pgs.38 and 39.

¹⁷Inst. 3:21:1.

¹⁸Inst. 3:24:12.

An unexpected treatment of the doctrine is found in his second edition of 1539 where he treats predestination together with providence in the same chapter, after the manner of Aquinas. Again Calvin starts from the great fact that the diversity of men's reactions to the Gospel is the result of the "secret judgement of God". First, it is made clear that some are predestined to salvation and others to damnation. Then it is explained that "this world is governed by the providence of God, seeing that all which is done depends on His decree". Here the explanation of predestination is that it is a particular doctrine inseparable from a general doctrine of providence:

"We constitute God master and director of all things of whom we say that from the beginning He has according to wisdom determined that which He should do and now executes according to His power all that which he has deliberated".

The definition of predestination follows consequent upon this definition of providence:

"We call predestination the eternal counsel of God by which He has determined what He wishes to make of each man. Because He does not create all in equal condition but ordains some to eternal life and others to eternal damnation".

It is surprising that Calvin, after considering the doctrine in the light of Christ in the first edition, can suddenly view it with a concept of God which approximates to Omnipotent Will, governing and irresistibly directing each and every creature according to His own law, and thus disposing also of the salvation and perdition of men.¹⁹ Here error may arise, the error of supposing that God is irresistibly efficacious power "in abstracto". On such a scheme the doctrine of predestination is only one moment or part in a deterministic plan.

The Varying Positions given to Predestination in his Writings.

We should notice at a glance the varying positions given

¹⁹Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, The Doctrine of God, Vol. 2, Pt. 2, Pg. 44.

to this doctrine in these editions so as to see that this principle was no central motif with Calvin. The primary passage in the first edition (1536) on the election of grace appeared in the second chapter where the fourth article of the Creed, "Credo ecclesiam", is expounded. There the emphasis is upon the Church defined as the "number of the elect" the doctrine being used to emphasise the certainty and stability of our salvation in Christ:

"moreover the Church is the elect of God: this does not - mean that those who are members of it nevertheless perish or through evil are lost".

In the editions 1539 - 54 the chapter "De praedestinatione et providentia Dei" follows either a chapter on the difference between the Old and New Testaments or one on human traditions, while it precedes the expositions of the Lord's Prayer. In the 1559 edition the contents of this chapter which deal with the predestination to salvation or reprobation to perdition are placed towards the end of Book III, following a long discussion of justification by faith and the chapters on Christian liberty and prayer. On the other hand, the contents of the chapter which deals with providence are placed in Book I after the chapters on Creation and the Original State of man. A knowledge of the bare form of the 1559 edition might suggest that Calvin had some architectonic principle in view, but the almost haphazard structure of the earlier editions successfully refutes this. The very ordering of the theme of predestination in various editions of the Institutes shows that Calvin had no conscious idea that it could be in any way the foundation-stone of his theology.²⁰

We must count it highly in Calvin's favour that methodologically in the final edition of the Institutes he broke definitely with the tradition of Aquinas, Bonaventura, and Zwingli, who spoke of predestination from the standpoint of

²⁰Quoted from thesis by S.H. Russell.

the divine omnipotence and the general providence of God, and treated providence with creation, and predestination (Inst. III: 21 - 24) as the climax of the communication of the grace of God manifested and active in Jesus Christ. ²¹

Reliable evidence of his sense of its importance is seen in the place he assigned to it in his various summaries of Christian doctrine. In his first Catechism (1537) there is a paragraph in which the doctrine is stated as a fact of observation, while he strongly deprecates looking into the mystery lying behind it as likely to lead to pain and madness. ²²

It is interesting to note that predestination is dealt with immediately after Christology here, from where we can look backwards to Christ Himself as the basis of our election. ²³

The Confession of Faith drawn up in the same year has a long paragraph where election and reprobation are clearly stated, with a strong warning not to pry into the reasons for God's sovereign acts and an exhortation to embrace Christ who is "the seal of our election" for once by faith "we possess also life in Him, we have no need to search further into the counsel of God". No explicit reference appears in the second Genevan Catechism (1541) although the Church is defined as "that body and society of believers whom God has predestined to eternal life".

Four Confessions are attributed to Calvin, and of these three allude only in passing to predestination, and then only in the sense of election as opposed to reprobation.

²⁴The Confession for the Church at Paris (1557) states that "we believe it is by the sole mercy of God that the elect are delivered from the general perdition in which all men are plunged ..."

²¹ K. Barth, Op. Cit. Pg. 46.

²² A.M. Hunter, The Teaching of Calvin, Pg. 94.

²³ K. Barth, Op. Cit., Pg. 84.

²⁴ Opera Omnia Vol. IX, Pg. 716.

²⁵The Confession to the Scholars in Geneva (1559) asserts that "the perseverance which has remained in the angels has come from the free election of God who has continued His love and goodness towards them, giving them unmoveable firmness to persist always in good".

²⁶The Confession for the French Churches, to be presented to the Emperor Maximilian (1562) states that

"we hold that this kindness which He displays towards us proceeds solely from His having chosen us before the creation of the world, and we seek no reason for His having done so outside of Himself and His good pleasure".

Only the third Confession, which has become with hardly any modification the Confession of the French Reformed Churches (called "The Confession of La Rochelle") speaks especially of predestination, while this is essentially election to salvation.

²⁷The Confession for the Synod of Paris (1559) asserts

"we believe that man having been created pure and whole and conformed to the image of God is by his own fault fallen from the grace which he had received. We believe that from this corruption and condemnation in which all men are plunged God withdraws those whom in His eternal and unmoveable counsel He has elected by His sole goodness and mercy in our Lord Jesus Christ, without taking into account their works, leaving the others in this same corruption".

Predestination assumes prominence through Controversy.

At the same time it is true that in the various editions of the Institutes Calvin gave the theme of predestination increasing attention. The main reason for this was because the doctrine of predestination became one of the primary sources of controversy at the time. One writer has suggested that had it not been for the exigencies of controversy, Calvin might never have given the doctrine the prominence it came to assume in his teaching.²⁸ Between 1539 and 1559 the doctrine met with so many objections that Calvin was forced to give predestination a more prominent place in polemical works while he also

²⁵ Opera Omnia, Vol. IX, Pg. 721, 723.

²⁶ Ibid, Pg. 756, 757.

²⁷ Ibid, Pg. 742, 743, 744.

²⁸ A.M. Hunter, Op.Cit. Pg. 96.

became more precise in his exposition of it. His chief antagonists at the time were Pighius, Bolsec and Castellio. On the other hand it is interesting that Calvin felt it necessary to oppose Zwingli on this subject in the 1539 edition of the Institutes. Zwingli in his De Providentia Dei seemed to Calvin to affirm that it was possible to have a clearer understanding of divine predestination than he would allow. This he had arrived at with a speculative and deterministic view of God as "the first moving Cause"²⁹.

It was, however, Bolsec's vigorous assault that made Calvin magnify the importance of predestination as he desired to use it as a safeguard for the evangelical principle of Grace.³⁰ Albert Pighius died during his controversy with Calvin on free-will and predestination,³¹ so that Calvin took as the basis of his new discussion with Bolsec the last four books of Pighius' work and published the Treatise of the Eternal Predestination of God early in 1552. The conference called by Calvin at Geneva in December, 1551, to answer Bolsec was remarkable for its brevity and clarity, especially in the statement of predestination closely bound up with the doctrine of providence. The trilogy stood out prominently in the statement: no merit, certitude of salvation, and the sovereignty of God.

The most interesting assertion in Calvin's controversy with Castellio (1557) is that which completely identified predestination and the sovereignty of God:

"Predestination", he says, "in just as many terms as the Holy Spirit teaches is the free counsel of God by which He governs the human species and each part of the world according to His infinite wisdom and incomprehensible justice".³²

²⁹ R. Seeberg, The History of Doctrines, Pg. 313.

³⁰ A.M. Hunter, Op.Cit. Pg. 96.

³¹ R. Seeberg, The History of Doctrines, Pg. 420.

³² Opera Omnia, Vol. 9, Pg. 287.

Election: The Expression of the Doctrine of Grace.

Calvin's pre-occupation with the defence of the grace of God in redemption forced him to see how integral the doctrine of election was to his entire theological understanding. At the same time, he never looked upon the doctrine as the root of his theology. Indeed, in his catechism for children he avoids it altogether and teaches simply that each of us "should be assured that He loves us and wishes to be our Father and our Saviour",³³ Also, in his famous preface to the Locci of Melanchthon (1546) he obviously disagrees with the German reformer on free-will and predestination, yet he does not consider the disagreement large enough to prevent him contributing to the work.

Barth has observed that Calvin never connected the doctrine of predestination with the doctrine of God, whether directly or indirectly, as in later Reformed dogmatics.³⁴ This is another indication that it is a complete delusion to attribute to Calvin the establishment of this doctrine as the basic tenet from which all other doctrines are to be deduced.

Niesel sums up well the enquiry into the view that this doctrine is the basis to all of Calvin's theology:³⁵

"If anyone does maintain such a view, then here, as elsewhere, he is constructing the theology of Calvin as for one reason or another best suits himself".

Yet, on the other hand, we cannot agree with Niesel when he says that Calvin spoke of election as an important article, "but not more fully than of other matters". The doctrine is far too prominent, especially as the basis to the sovereignty of grace in salvation to say that Calvin placed it on the same level as all the rest.

What Calvin did appear to find in the doctrine of election was a first and final word on the whole reality of the Christian life, the word which tells us that the existence, continuance,

³³ J.T. McNeill, The History and Character of Calvinism, Pg.211.

³⁴ K. Barth, Op.Cit., Pg.86.

³⁵ W. Niesel, The Theology of Calvin, Pg. 166.

and future of that life are wholly and utterly of the free grace of God.³⁶ As Niesel himself says, "the doctrine of election is indeed the final and necessary expression of the evangelical doctrine of Grace".³⁷ To Calvin it was obvious that only a firm and prominent stress on God's election could uphold and maintain the freedom and sovereignty of God in the redemption of sinful men.

Election appreciated for its practical Value.

In the final edition of the Institutes, Calvin kept his main discussion of the doctrine in a position which implied that it was of great practical importance in the life of the believer, for it is closely connected with the doctrine of justification by faith, prayer and the liberty of the Christian man.³⁸ Also in his sermons election is intensely practical and directly related to the Christian life.³⁹ One scholar has said that as far as he has been able to discover "Calvin never states mere philosophical truth in his sermons", for the preaching of predestination has for its aim the personal assurance of salvation in the life of the believer, as one chosen and called by God.⁴⁰

Three Influences on Calvin's formulation of Election.

(a) Of the various factors which influenced Calvin in his formulation of election, his view of Scripture undoubtedly heightened his sense of the importance of election. The Scriptures were the Word of God because they were the oracles composed "at the dictation of the Holy Spirit", for whom the apostles were "certain and authentic secretaries"⁴¹ While some of his contemporaries expressed the view that the doctrine

³⁶ K. Barth, Church Dogmatics, Vol.2, Pt.2, Pg.86.

³⁷ W. Niesel, Op.Cit., Pg. 168.

³⁸ Institutes, Book Three.

³⁹ T.H.L. Parker, The Oracles of God, Pg. 84.

⁴⁰ L. Nixon, John Calvin, Expository Preacher, Pg. 86.

⁴¹ R. Davies, The Problem of Authority in the Continental Reformers, Pg. 114.

Cf. also the fine article by A.D. Polman, Calvin on the Inspiration of Scripture, in John Calvin Contemporary Prophet, Pg. 97.

of predestination ought to be reserved as a kind of secret wisdom for theologians of sobriety and discretion, and not be published abroad among the people, Calvin insisted that what is revealed to us in Scripture is as such necessary and useful to be known by all as "it is the school of the Holy Spirit".⁴² Everything delivered in Scripture on the subject of predestination "we must beware of keeping from the faithful lest we seem either maliciously to deprive them of the blessing of God or to accuse and scoff at the Spirit"⁴³ Thus part of his insistence on election came from his view of himself as primarily an interpreter of the Word of God as it is given in Scripture.⁴⁴

Calvin was right in his insistence that Scripture should be taken seriously, but his arguments would have been more convincing if he had not attempted to construct his doctrine of predestination on the twin pillars of experience and the testimony of scripture.

(b) We have already noted the profound impression made upon Calvin by St. Augustine. He was Calvin's acknowledged master here: even a cursory examination of Calvin's teaching on the subject will reveal that he cites Augustine far more than any other non-biblical writer. On occasion he can go so far as to say that he could write a confession of his belief on this subject out of Augustine's writings.⁴⁵ Quotations from Augustine abound in Calvin's writings, while the similarities between the two writers are very noticeable. They both possess a deterministic cosmology, though Augustine does not develop this aspect of his thought with such precision as does Calvin after him in his chapters on Providence in the third edition of the Institutes. Calvin is quite willing to say

⁴² Inst. 3:21:3.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ J.T. McNeill, John Calvin on the Christian Faith, Pg. xii.

⁴⁵ De Aet.Prae. VIII c. 266. For the thoroughgoing nature of Calvin's appeal to Augustine on this matter see Serv. et.Lib. Bk.3.VI. c. 292-326 and De Aet.Prae. VIII c.265-70.

with Augustine that God works in men's hearts to incline them to commit evil deeds, which He can use to His glory - though Augustine adds that evil men are only so moved as a desert for the sins which they have already committed.⁴⁶ As Calvin would likewise hold that all men are under the bondage of original sin, it is hard to distinguish any significant difference between his thought and that of Augustine's on this point. It is true that Calvin clearly enunciates a doctrine of double predestination (see Pg. 70), yet he can claim very good support from the phraseology of Augustine, even though Augustine does not present the doctrine in any systematic form. Like Augustine, who appeals to the "occulta justitia" of God which is far above human understanding, when the predestinating activity of God is called into account, Calvin resorts to saying that "God favours His elect, because He is pleased to do so, and shows mercy because He is pleased to do so".⁴⁷ At times also we find striking similarities of mood, as for example when we compare their attitude to certain texts which emphasise the universal aspects of the work of Christ. An example of this is their exegesis of I Tim. 2:4, "God our Saviour who will have all men to be saved ...", which Calvin interprets very like Augustine to mean that God, once having limited His mercy to a single nation, now extends it to the whole world and to every class, though not to every individual.⁴⁸ While it is impossible for us to say that Augustine and Calvin believed in a "limited atonement" (a doctrine which arose more for a desire for logical consistency than out of fidelity to the Biblical witness among Calvin's successors), it is doubtful whether they really took seriously

⁴⁶ See De Grat. et Lib. Arb. xx. 41 and 43. XLIV c.906 and 909.

⁴⁷ Inst. 3:22:8.

⁴⁸ Inst. 3:24:16.

the more universal aspects of the work of Christ as declared in the Scriptures.

(c) It is not always recognised, however, that Calvin's period in Strasburg (1538 - 41) when he came into contact with Martin Bucer did much to mould his predestinarian views.⁴⁹

"Principally", said Calvin, "I have wished to follow Bucer, a man of holy memory". Seeberg has noted that

"not only his ethical apprehension of the work of the Reformation, but also his views upon a number of important doctrines - as of sacraments, of predestination, and of faith - point distinctly to this source".⁵⁰

Two works of Bucer treat of predestination De regno Christi (where it is treated in a Christocentric setting) and his Introduction to the exposition of the epistle to the Romans where his predestinarian views are treated at some length. This is essentially election to salvation, but in a wider sense predestination is traced to the divine predetermination so that one may also speak of a "predestination of the wicked". Bucer's earlier and stronger views appeared in 1524 in Grund and Ursache where double predestination was taught in all its rigor, together with a doctrine of limited atonement and the work of the Holy Spirit in the elect alone. But with Bucer (as with Calvin later) this doctrine was before all a practical doctrine: the words "elect" and "reprobate" appear to be synonymous with "pious" and "wicked". The essential for him was the experience of the eternal choice of grace, the conversion of the sinner.

It is thus natural that the doctrine of Calvin, and by Calvin the doctrine and piety of the whole of Calvinism, should have born the special imprint of the doctrine and piety of Bucer. And that is especially evident on three points,

⁴⁹ From the article by E.G. Rupp, The Swiss Reformers and the Sects, Pg.115 in the New Cambridge Modern History, Vol.2.

⁵⁰ R. Seeberg, The History of Doctrines, Pg. 393.
cf. B.B. Warfield, Calvin and Augustine, Pg. 22.

according to Doumergue: first a close relationship with pietism, then an insistence on conversion and the moral character of the new life, and finally a sharp distinction between the converted and unconverted (or as Bucer said, "between the elect and reprobate"). One scholar notes that so closely do Calvin's modes of expression resemble those of Bucer here that he is inclined to believe Calvin derived the main strands of his predestination doctrine from Bucer.⁵¹ The impact of Bucer's formulation, with its intense practical concern, on Calvin can be seen in a brief comparison of Luther's doctrine of predestination with Calvin's. Luther in his fierce assault on Erasmus' De liberto arbitrio wrote De servo arbitrio (1525) in which his thought on predestination is governed more by a metaphysical determinism than by the New Testament conception of God.⁵² Luther thinks of predestination essentially in relation to the destiny of men, i.e., to eternal life. Calvin sees it in a more practical light, that the supreme end of eternal life is not attained without terrestrial means, i.e., obedience and order.⁵³ Thus predestination becomes for him, and for the Reformed Church, the source of an energy which leavens the whole of society. The elect are seen at once as constituting the mystical body of the Church and the living soul of human society.⁵⁴

Predestination: A Doctrine common to all the Reformers.

A general study of the theology of the Reformers will soon show us that this doctrine is by no means peculiar to Calvin. In one sense it is a primary dogma of the Reformation, since Luther, Melancthon, Zwingli, and Bucer all grappled

⁵¹ Scheibe, Calvins Prädestinationslehre (1897) as quoted in B. Warfield, Studies in Theology, Pg. 132.

⁵² R. Seeberg, A History of Doctrines, Pg. 244.

⁵³ L. Boettner, The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination, Pg. 408f. The practical importance of predestination is evidenced in Calvin's ethical reforms in Geneva.

⁵⁴ Doumergue, op. cit., Pg. 410.

with it in their attempts to re-establish a truly biblical theology. An appreciation of the theology of the reformers of the second generation (Beza, Peter Martyr, Musculus, Zanchi) reveals that this doctrine is still prominent in their writings, especially in its most extreme supralapsarian form. What we owe to Calvin is the clearest and most consistent expression of the doctrine of predestination in the Institutes and through his influence in the Reformed Creeds. But he cannot be designated "the theologian of predestination" or "the father of election", as in much popular thought.

In fact, Calvin states the doctrines of divine sovereignty and predestination more cautiously and biblically than either Luther or Zwingli had consistently done. All three maintained equally that God's sovereignty was absolute, that history was simply the temporal outworking of His eternal plan, that some had been unconditionally chosen for salvation while the rest had been reprobated; but Zwingli had tended to discuss these truths speculatively and Luther paradoxically, both with a certain admixture of philosophy. It was left to Calvin to expound predestination on a more prominently biblical basis, from an exclusively religious and pastoral point of view. That is, he was not forwarding a theory of the cosmic process: he was above all attempting to show how belief that God is sovereign in grace and redemption strengthens faith in, prompts prayer to, and evokes worship of the One from whom our salvation proceeds.⁵⁵ It is from this standpoint that one must view Calvin's doctrine of election.

⁵⁵ J. Packer, Calvin the Theologian, in the International Reformed Bulletin Oct. 1959.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESUPPOSITIONS: CALVIN'S DOCTRINE OF
MAN AND DOCTRINE OF GOD.

Before treating Calvin's doctrine of election in more detail it is essential that we first place it in a right perspective against the background of the basic motifs of his theology, especially his teaching on the nature of man¹ and the Living God. It is true that Calvin always begins with the Scriptural data concerning the subject at hand and does not infer one dogma from another, a method which is characteristic of seventeenth century Calvinism.² His predestinarian views, however, are obviously influenced by his doctrine of man and God, to which we now turn.

The Imago Dei in Calvin's Theology:

For Calvin the image of God resides chiefly in the soul, although the divine glory is also reflected in man's outward appearance.³ The term imago dei refers to

"the integrity with which Adam was endued when his intellect was clear, his affections subordinated to reason, all his senses duly regulated, and when he truly ascribed all his excellence to the admirable gifts of His Maker".⁴

Here we see that Calvin has followed Augustine and the Scholastics by interpreting the imago dei in terms of rationality, a view partly derived from Greek philosophy and particularly from the Stoics.⁵ Professor Torrance is guilty of special pleading when he says that,

"Calvin does not think of the imago dei in terms of being, that is, in terms of man being this or that in himself, but in terms of a spiritual relation to the gracious will of God".⁶

¹ An exhaustive and brilliant treatment of Calvin's doctrine of man will be found in T.F. Torrance, Calvin's Doctrine of Man.

² A.D. Polman, Barth, Pg. 33.

³ Inst. 3.23.3.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ D. Cairns, The Image of God in Man, Pg. 112.

⁶ T.F. Torrance, Op. Cit., Pg. 79, 80. Italics mine.

No evidence for this is found in Calvin; on the contrary we do find a clear claim that the imago dei is God's gift of rationality to man. The more prominent biblical emphasis on the imago understood as a saving, dynamic relationship of faith, as an "analogis relationis" is not obvious in Calvin's writings.⁷ Contrary to Augustine, he expressly repudiated the idea that the will is primary in man in his commentary on Ephesians 4.17,

"the mind holds the highest rank in the human constitution, is the seat of reason,⁸ presides over the will, and restrains sinful desires".⁸

Original Sin:

Man was created with freedom of will by which if he chose he would be able to obtain eternal life. Adam could have stood if he so wished, and though he was not granted the gift of perseverance it was by his own will that he fell.⁹ Adam received the various human endowments for the whole human race, so that when he fell they were at the same time lost to mankind and his corruption was passed on to his descendants.¹⁰ It is obvious how close Calvin stands to Augustine at this point. He does, however, differ from Augustine on the transmission of Adam's sin and guilt to his descendants; there is nothing in fact which necessitates this transmission except the fiat of God.¹¹ It is his will that the nature of man should be such that the state of sin is passed on. Why and how it is passed on he refuses to discuss.

Adam is then the root of the human race, and as a result of his Fall the image of God in man is so corrupted as to be

⁷ cf. T.F. Torrance, The Word of God and the Nature of Man, an article in Reformation Old and New (ed. F.W. Camfield) For a clear presentation of the Biblical and Reformed view of man. cf. also S. Babbage, Man in Nature and Grace, Pgs. 9-23.

⁸ cf. Inst. 1:15:8 "the will being thus perfectly submissive to the authority of reason...."

⁹ Inst. 1:15:8.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Inst. 2.1.7,8.

"a fearful deformity",¹² though not totally defaced. Though everyone is liable to the punishment for his own deeds, original sin alone is sufficient for the condemnation of all men. Although sin may not appear openly in young children, yet there is so much latent corruption enclosed in their souls as to render them worthy of condemnation before God.¹³ Calvin's telling argument against predestination "after merits which have been foreseen"¹⁴ is that all God could possibly foresee in men apart from the working of His grace would be worthy of eternal condemnation.¹⁵

Although Calvin would maintain that he was merely following Scripture and especially the Pauline conception of man, it is nevertheless obvious that in this discussion he has been strongly influenced by his extensive reading of St. Augustine's writings.

The Doctrine of Total Depravity:

The depravity caused by the Fall is of a total nature¹⁶ so that the whole man falls under the influence of sin:

"we are so entirely controlled by the power of sin that the whole mind, the whole heart, and all our actions are under its influence. Compulsion I always except, for we sin spontaneously, as it would be no sin were it not voluntary. But we are so given up to sin that we can do willingly nothing but sin; for the corruption which bears rule within us thus drives us onward".¹⁷

The words used by Calvin to describe this fallen state are "perversity", "depravity", and "corruption". It is important to understand clearly Calvin's presentation of this state of fallen man: when we come to think of man as he actually is we

¹² cf. Comm. on Rom. 3:23 "Man is altogether spoiled of all glory and partial righteousness is a Fable".

¹³ Comm. on Ezekiel 18.20.

¹⁴ "post praevisa merita".

¹⁵ De. aet. Dei. praed. VIII. c. 308.

¹⁶ Inst. 2.1.9.

¹⁷ Comm. on Romans 7.14.

must think of man within the context of grace from which he has fallen.¹⁸

Calvin refused to enunciate a doctrine in abstraction from the new creation in Christ where man is placed in the light of his original state; so that the imago dei in which and unto which man is created we see at last in Christ. This means that by starting from the fact of grace, Calvin forms his doctrine of man's present depravity only as a corollary of grace.¹⁹ The revelation of the grace of God in Christ which results in a new creation carries with it a total judgement upon man as he is, including mind and will, that is, upon "the natural man". It is because faith must speak of salvation and forgiveness in total terms that it must also speak of sin and depravity in total terms.²⁰ Because his fundamental relation with God is perverted, his whole nature is depraved and all parts of him are corrupted. Total corruption and total depravity in the spiritual sense in which Calvin uses these terms means a total perversion, because fallen man is actually turned away in his being and acts from God - and this is his complete alienation and death.²¹

Because he is turned away from God, he is also alienated from himself.²² As a result of this distorted relationship all that is and remains man is perverted - which applies equally to the imago dei because whatever remains of that is now a "horrible deformity".²³ As Calvin says,

¹⁸ T.F. Torrance, The Word of God and the Nature of Man, Pg.129.

¹⁹ Comm. on John 3.3f ; 3.17f. ; Rom. 6.21 ; Inst. 2.16.1-3, Comm. on I John 5.16.

²⁰ T.F. Torrance, Calvin's Doctrine of Man, Pg. 85.

²¹ Comm. on John 11:25 ; cf. 17:6. "...they are particularly hostile to Himself".

²² Comm. on Gen. 3.1, Gal. 5:19-23.

²³ Inst. 1.15.4 cf. 1.15.1 where "miserable ruin" is another favourite expression; Sermon on Job 14.13.

"true it is when we come into the world we bring some remnant of God's image wherein Adam was created: howbeit the same image is as disfigured as we are full of unrighteousness, and there is nothing but blindness and ignorance in our minds".²⁴

Thus Calvin can go on to define original sin as "an hereditary corruption and depravity of our nature extending to all parts of the soul"²⁵ and can even say that "the whole nature is a seed-bed of sin" in which "perversity never ceases".²⁶ It is on this point of total depravity that Calvin expressly quarrels with the Roman Church. He refuses to allow that fallen man retains human nature in its essential integrity even though he has lost the "supernatural" gifts and graces with which he was endowed.²⁷ Though they admit, he says, that our nature has become depraved, they try to limit it to an inclination to evil residing in the inferior part of the soul, and deny that it exists in a person subsequent to baptism. We can, however, have no real idea of sin unless we think of it as extending to every part of the soul and corrupting every part of the heart and mind of man.²⁸ Moreover, Calvin erects this doctrine of total depravity against any insinuation that man has something of his own which he is able to contribute to his salvation.²⁹ Total depravity prepares the way for the evangelical assurance that our salvation is the act of God's sovereign grace, un-touchable by human activity or weakness.³⁰

Sweeping as this may seem, Calvin will not, however, allow that every gift of God has been completely lost to man; instead he quotes with approval the saying of Augustine that

²⁴ Sermon on Job 14.13.

²⁵ Inst. 2.1.8. ; cf. Comm. on Eph. 2.3.

²⁶ Ibid.; Inst. 4.15.10 "their whole nature is a seed of sin".

²⁷ T.F. Torrance, Op. Cit., Pg. 108.

²⁸ Comm. on Ps. 51.7.

²⁹ Nec. Reform. Church. VI. c. 483.

³⁰ J.S. Whale, The Protestant Tradition, Pg. 144.

man's natural gifts have been corrupted by sin, while his supernatural ones have been taken away.³¹ By supernatural gifts Calvin means

"the light of faith and righteousness which would have been sufficient for the attainment of the heavenly life and everlasting felicity.....all things which pertain to the blessed life of the soul are extinguished in him ...among these are faith, love to God, charity toward our neighbour, the study of righteousness and holiness... all these when restored to us by Christ are to be regarded as adventitious and above nature".³²

Concerning natural gifts, Calvin says

"soundness of mind and integrity of heart were at the same time withdrawn and it is that which constitutes the corruption of natural gifts. For although there is still some residue of intelligence and judgement as well as will, we cannot call a mind sound and entire which is both weak and immersed in darkness".³³

According to Calvin man still possesses intelligence to understand earthly matters - among which are included politics, science, and the liberal arts, but the utter incapacity of his reason is revealed once it attempts to raise itself to divine matters.³⁴

The Will in Nature:

Turning to Calvin's view of the human will we note the title of Chapter Two in Book Two, Man now deprived of Freedom of Will and miserably enslaved. He sees the nature of man as being composed of two parts, viz., intellect and will. The Fall has destroyed the freedom of both the intellect and will. Quoting Augustine³⁵ he maintains that man, by making a bad use of free will, lost both himself and free will so that the will is "subject to lusts which conquer and enchain it". Reason or intellect as a natural gift was not entirely destroyed, but was

³¹ Inst. 2.2.12.

³² Ibid. Italics mine.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Inst. 2.2.13.

³⁵ John Calvin, On the Reformation of the Church, Pg. 76, ed. T.F. Torrance.

so corrupted that "a shapeless ruin is all that remains"³⁶. Similarly the will because inseparable from the nature of man did not perish but was so enslaved by depraved lusts as to be incapable of one righteous desire³⁷,

"if the whole man is subject to the dominion of sin, surely the will which is its principal seat must be bound with the closest of chains".³⁸

Man, since he was corrupted by the Fall, sins not because he is forced, but voluntarily "by a most forward bias of his mind", not by violent compulsion or external force, but by the movement of his own passion; and yet, such is the depravity of his nature that he cannot move and act except in the direction of evil.³⁹

In one passage Calvin compares human freedom to that of God and the devil; God's free-will is not impeded because He necessarily must act rightly, while the devil sins voluntarily though of necessity he can do nothing but evil. If this is so, man does not sin less voluntarily because he is under the necessity of sinning.⁴⁰

Calvin clearly distinguishes between enslavement and compulsion of the will:

"For the sake of learning, as the word itself signifies, the truth must be spoken so that it may be understood what necessity is. Therefore we call necessity that which is not turned this way or that of its own accord or by an internal movement of choice, but is violently carried away by an external compulsion. We call that voluntary which turns of its own free-will whether it is led, but is not carried off by force. Finally, the will is a slave which because of its corruption is kept captive under the power of its evil desires, so that it can choose nothing but evil even if it does so of its own accord and freely, not driven by external compulsion. According to these definitions, we give to a man power of judgement, and voluntary at that; so that if he does anything wrong he ought to impute it to himself and of his own free choice".⁴¹

36 Inst. 2.2.12.

37 Ibid.

38 Inst. 2.2.27.

39 Inst. 2.3.5.

40 Ibid.

41 Resp. contra Pig. VI. p.280. (CR)
I am indebted to Russell for this quotation.

If free-will is to be opposed to a coerced will, Calvin would say that man possesses free-will, and would oppose as a heretic anyone who denied it.

Knowledge after the Fall and Natural Religion:

Finally, we must consider briefly what kind of knowledge is left to man after the Fall. Calvin answers this shortly in his commentary on John 1:5,

"The light which still dwells in corrupt nature consists chiefly of two parts: first, all men naturally possess some seed of religion and, secondly, the distinction between good and evil is engraved on their conscience".

Calvin maintains that there exists in fallen man an inherent, universal, and indelible "sensus divinitatis". At the end of Chapter IV in the first book of the Institutes (1.4.4.) he concludes:

"Yet this is further proof of what I now contend for that a deitas sensum is naturally engraved in the hearts of men, since necessity exhorts a confession of it, even from the reprobates themselves. In the time of tranquillity they facetiously mock God, and with loquacious impertinence derogate from His power. But if any despair weighs them down, it stimulates them to seek Him, and dictates short prayers; which proves that they are not altogether ignorant of God...."

There is in the heart of every man a "divinitus religionis semen" but this is usually stifled or when it is cherished by fallen man he is not led by it to a true worship of God but into superstition and idolatry.⁴²

Concerning the light of natural religion which is left in man Calvin says that there is no race so barbarous which does not possess some conviction of the existence of God.⁴³ In fact there is an objective revelation of God in His works, but because of sin man is not able to discern the Creator in His works.⁴⁴ For Calvin the function of the revelation of God in nature is therefore negative, to take away excuse for sin and

⁴² T.H.L.Parker, Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God, Pg.31.

⁴³ Comm. on Hab. 1.16.

⁴⁴ G.C. Berkouwer, General Revelation, Pg. 30.

to make men guilty before God, thereby serving as a preparation for the Gospel.⁴⁵ Men constantly faced with this objective revelation do not apprehend the true God to whom it witnesses but become idolaters by worshipping the idols of their imagination. Even in the intellect of fallen man there are certain sparks of knowledge concerning God and his duty, yet because of this fallenness this knowledge is radically distorted and obscured. In fact it is through this distortion of knowledge that fallen man loses his freedom, thus becoming blind in his idolatry.

The Will when under grace:

In concluding our review of Calvin's doctrine of man it is interesting to note his jealousy for divine grace which leads him to deny free-will both in the natural man and the man who is under grace. In this he differs from Augustine who held that the Holy Spirit restores to man the power of willing good. The grace of God operates in our wills, transforming, assisting, working, urging to good works. Calvin believes there is a dynamic relationship between God and the will of regenerate man - the author of every good work is in fact God. It is all of God,

"...everything good in the will is entirely the result of grace".⁴⁶

"...to show our utter destitution, Paul argues, that we merit nothing because we are created in Jesus Christ unto good works, which God has prepared; again intimating by these words that all the fruits of good works are originally and immediately from God".⁴⁷

Oman has rightly contended that if Calvin is right here there is no real goodness in the behaviour of the redeemed in that they do not freely will it.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ T.H.L. Parker, Op. Cit., Pg. 39.

⁴⁶ Inst. 2.3.6.

⁴⁷ Inst. 4.14.7.

⁴⁸ J. Oman, Grace and Personality, Pg. 48.

The Basis for his Doctrine of God:

Turning to Calvin's doctrine of God we find him making the clear assertion that

"they who imagine God in His naked majesty apart from Christ have an idol in the place of God".⁴⁹

But while we are impressed with Calvin's bold declaration of the basis for his understanding of the divine nature, we nevertheless find that in his treatment of the doctrine of God he has not always obeyed his own axiom.⁵⁰ In fact, because he did not make it clear in the opening chapters of the Institutes that Christ is the starting point for all understanding of God, whether as Creator or Redeemer, the result is that some have misinterpreted him to be a natural theologian.⁵¹ We need not develop this here, except to say that his apparent ambiguity has caused Seeberg to conclude that in Calvin's doctrine of God Omnipotent Will is the controlling thought.⁵²

Calvin himself says of Providence, in the last resort "we must account God's will the best of all reasons", and that we are to "regard His will as our only rule of justice".⁵³ This overpowering sense of the providential will of God is noticeable throughout all his writings and profoundly influences his formulation of the doctrine of predestination. Hunter considers that Calvin's early sympathy with the principles of Stoicism and the saturation of his mind with Augustine's teaching caused him to make sovereign will central to his doctrine of God.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Comm. on I Peter 1.2.

⁵⁰ A.M. Hunter, The Teaching of Calvin, Pg. 50.

⁵¹ T.H.L. Parker, Op. Cit., Pg. 125.

⁵² Parker notes that from Calvin's writings and expositions it is more obvious that Christ was the centre of his thought in preaching.

⁵² R. Seeberg, The History of Doctrine, Pg. 396.

⁵³ Inst. 1.17. 1 and 2.

⁵⁴ A.M. Hunter, Op. Cit., Pg. 50.

The Relation Between God's Action and Man's Life in the World:

God, for Calvin, is not a momentary Creator who completed His work once for all and then left it.⁵⁵ The divine omnipotence does not alternate between action and non-action, but is continually active, "vigilant, efficacious, energetic".⁵⁶ As Creator He is also Governor and Preserver, not merely imposing general motion to the world but by His special providence sustaining all things even down to a drop of rain.⁵⁷ For God to govern the world through each creature's nature would only lead to confused government,⁵⁸ so Calvin rejects any idea that God governs only through prescience; the reason why God foreknows an event is because He has determined it.⁵⁹ Both prescience and predestination are attributed by Calvin to God, but he explicitly refuses to make predestination dependent on prescience.⁶⁰ Quoting Paul, he declares that whatever virtue appears in men is the result of election - this destroys any sense of merit which men imagine to exist in themselves.⁶¹ "Prescience" means for Calvin that for God there is no past or future, but that all things are present for Him.⁶² This disparagement of prescience as determining the divine activity flows logically from Calvin's understanding of God's action in governing the world. No real place is given to created natures as God governs His creation directly, therefore in the last resort nothing can be foreseen by God apart from His own actions.⁶³ On the other hand it is noticeable in his

⁵⁵ Inst. 1.16.1.

⁵⁶ Inst. 1.16.3.

⁵⁷ Inst. 1.16.5.

⁵⁸ Comm. on Acts 2.23.

⁵⁹ Comm. on Gen. 41.17.

⁶⁰ Inst. 3.21.5.

⁶¹ Inst. 3.22.2.

⁶² Inst. 3.21.5.

⁶³ A.M. Hunter, Op. Cit., Pg. 137.

discussion of the responsibility of man and of original sin that Calvin does allow that man possesses a nature of his own.

Calvin, further, will not allow any distinction between permission and ordination.⁶⁴ Men, in fact, do nothing save

"...at the secret instigation of God, and do not discuss and deliberate on anything but what He has previously decreed with Himself and brings to pass by His secret discretion...."

God so rules and governs men that they cannot move even one of their little fingers without accomplishing a work of God.⁶⁵

God's providential control over men is thus to be seen in two ways - not only does He influence their minds in whatever direction He wishes, but He also overrules their wicked devices to a good end.⁶⁶ Why both types of sovereignty are necessary Calvin does not discuss, but this passage reveals Calvin's lack of clarity about the function of human activity. This we shall see more clearly when we examine his defence against the charge that God is the author of evil.

Calvin's Attitude to Secondary Causes:

Calvin's attitude to secondary causes vacillates. At one time he is prepared to admit them in the fullest sense of the word:

"Indeed the truth is, that God does nothing which He has not decreed by His own secret providence before the creation of the world: but sometime intermediate causes intervene, why this or that should happen (that is, effecting the happening of this or that point)".⁶⁷

However, in the Institutes he will hardly allow "second causes" any status whatever and they are regarded as "instrumenta" rather than as real agents. For Calvin the truth is that since

"the will of God is said to be the cause of all things, all the counsels and actions of men must be held to be governed by His providence; so that He not only exerts His power in the elect, who are guided by the Holy

⁶⁴ Inst. 1.18.1.

⁶⁵ De aet. Dei. Praed. VIII c. 105f.

⁶⁶ Comm. on Ps. 105.17.

⁶⁷ Comm. on Ex. 4.14.

Spirit, but also forces the reprobate to do Him service"⁶⁸
 Calvin quotes as examples a man falling among robbers or being
 shipwrecked at sea: the carnal mind will attribute this to
 "fortune", but the believer will see that all events are govern-
 ed by the secret counsel of God.⁶⁹

That God is a vague primary cause he rejects, since
 God's providence consists of definite and constant action.⁷⁰
 Also disallowed are proximate or secondary causes introduced to
 cover the real cause of divine predestination or reprobation in
 religious discussion.⁷¹ In other passages, however, he suggests
 that God's activity does not violate the nature of secondary
 causes, and is not separated from them.⁷²

His Two Conceptions of God's Actions in Relation to the World:

While we have already seen that Calvin attempts to separate predestination from providence, it is nevertheless obvious that his treatment of the eternal destinies of men is conditioned by a cardinal sense of the divine sovereignty. This is evident in the recurring refrain, "the secret counsel of God" and "nothing happens but what he has knowingly and willingly decreed". Furthermore, it appears that Calvin is struggling unconsciously with two different conceptions of the actions of the Living God; in one he affirms that it is "cold and lifeless to represent God as a momentary Creator, who completed His work once for all and then left it"⁷³, while the other sees God bound by a plan laid out before time, following a course determined and restrict-

⁶⁸ Inst. 1.18.2.

⁶⁹ Inst. 1.16.2.

⁷⁰ Inst. 1.16.3,4.

⁷¹ Comm. on Rom. 11.7.

⁷² De. aet. Dei praed. VIII c. 354.

⁷³ Inst. 1.16.1.

cf. Prof. Torrance's observation that "it is significant that to the question, 'What is God's Being?', Calvin answers only with verbs (eg. Serm. on Deut. 32.32f.) In other words, Calvin's biblical doctrine of the Living God is in complete contrast to the Aristotelian and Scholastic conception of the Divine Being".

ed by His own "decree". This latter view will appear more clearly in the formulation of his predestinarian views, where the predetermined destinies of men are blatantly asserted.

Two Objections to his Understanding of God:

There are two main objections to his view of the living God with which Calvin had to deal in the Institutes.

(a) First, the charge was laid against him that in his conception of God he approximated to Stoic fatalism.⁷⁴ In reply he points out that the Stoics imagine "a necessity consisting of a perpetual chain of causes", and their scheme thus rests upon the inviolability of the natural order of cause and events, while the Christian Faith refers all events to the wise and determined action of the living God:

"we acknowledge God as the arbiter and director of all things who, according to His wisdom, decreed from the remote eternity what He would do, and now by His power executes what He decreed".⁷⁵

Here the static view of God is evident, and the totality of events in the universe, both in nature and the lives of men, is referred back to the eternal counsel of God. It is interesting that Calvin does not attack the irresistibility of fate here, but rather refuses to accept the impersonality of the Stoic conception. "Fortune" and "chance"⁷⁶ are described as "heathen terms" because

"if all success is blessing from God and calamity and adversity are His curse, there is no place left in human affairs for Fortune and chance".⁷⁷

(b) The other objection was that his view made God the author of evil. It must be admitted that this charge Calvin found hardest to meet. At times he is driven to retire within the impregnable citadel of inerrant Scripture and call for adoring

⁷⁴ Inst. 1.16.8.

⁷⁵ Italics mine.

⁷⁶ cf. Luke 10.31 "by chance there came down a certain priest.."

⁷⁷ Inst. 1.16.8.

acceptance of divine truth. His logic carries him to a position he cannot relinquish without endangering the whole basis of his doctrine.⁷⁸ Calvin refused to take the Augustinian line of defence here of arguing that, as evil is essentially a negation of being, God could not be regarded as its author. Instead, he preferred to maintain that those things wickedly done by man can be justly termed the works of God⁷⁹; and he quotes various Old Testament examples to show how the wickedness of men at the same time was seen as the will of God. Men commit theft or murder because they are thieves and murderers, but God uses their wickedness to a righteous end, either to chastise one person or exercise the patience of another.⁸⁰ Calvin refuses to say that the wicked sin by necessity, but holds rather that necessity lies in God's working out His plan through their evil deeds.⁸¹ We have already noted that he refuses to take refuge in the view that God simply allows sin: in the Consensus Pastorum he echoed Zwingli by insisting that "God does not merely allow sin; it happens actually by His will".⁸² Constantly, however, he returns to the mystery of the cross of Christ.⁸³ It is precisely there that we see "how in the same event the guilt of men is declared and the righteousness of God shines forth". He uses the analogy of a dead body which placed in the sun gives off a foul stench, and yet we do not blame the sun for these odours. In a similar way the action of God is related to the wickedness of men; His righteous action brings forth their wickedness, yet He is in no way responsible for their sin.⁸⁴

⁷⁸ A.M. Hunter, Op. Cit., Pg. 142.

⁷⁹ Inst. 1.18.4.

⁸⁰ Comm. on Acts 2.23.

⁸¹ Contra Pighius VI. c. 256. (CR)

⁸² A.M. Hunter, Op. Cit., Pg. 142.

⁸³ W. Niesel, The Theology of Calvin, Pg. 77.

⁸⁴ Inst. 1.17.5.

We may note here that Calvin recognises man as possessing a nature of his own, and as not just a passive instrument in the hand of God. When discussing divine justice and human responsibility it would appear that Calvin has a different view of God from what one would expect when we read some of his statements about the all-embracing nature of providence.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ I am grateful to Russell for this comment.

CHAPTER FIVE.

CALVIN'S DOCTRINE OF ELECTION.

On predestination we have already noted that Calvin was profoundly influenced by St. Augustine, whose name and writings he used profusely in controversial discussion with opponents. Barth, however, maintains that his immediate source was the writings of Isidore of Seville in the 7th century and the monk, Gottschalk, who lived in the 9th century who taught that "predestination is twofold - either of the elect unto repose or of the reprobate unto death". For both predestination clearly means "double predestination": double in the sense that election and rejection are two parallel movements within the one genus designated by the term predestination. Barth also notes that some passages in Calvin are strongly evangelical, but in his formal statements he clung to the fatal parallelism of election and rejection.¹

Calvin's approach to election:

To Calvin election was the great buttress to piety and faith, for from it flowed the certainty of salvation, true humility and the glory of God.²

When he begins to open up this doctrine in the Institutes Calvin warns against a speculative approach being used. We are to remember that we are

"penetrating into the recesses of the divine wisdom, where he who rushes forward securely and confidently instead of satisfying his curiosity will enter an inextricable labyrinth".³

God's eternal counsels are for us "a tremendous and unfathomable abyss"⁴; if we attempt to explore them "all our understanding

¹ K. Barth, Church Dogmatics, Vol. 2, Pt. 2, Pg. 17.

² Inst. 3:23:1.

³ Inst. 3:21:1.

⁴ CR 44, 407.

will be unavailing".⁵ He warns us further that excessive pre-occupation with eternal predestination as an idea in itself leads to uncertainty and despair. Merely by enquiring about election in itself and "going back even to the remotest eternity" we fall into a labyrinthine maze of fancies and snares in which we become completely lost⁶; we should "over and over again become entangled in and dazzled by our own ingenuity before being able to grasp the purpose of God".⁷ If we seek our salvation in God's inscrutable will, we become involved in over-ingenious speculations.⁸ It is unfortunate that certain later disciples of Calvin did not take these warnings seriously when formulating their predestinarian views!

Calvin warns against such speculation because he attempts to regulate his theology by the Incarnation. Apart from revelation access to God is barred to theology - therefore we may not seek to determine what God has determined within Himself before all time.⁹ He is strongly convinced that

"the word of the Lord is the only way which can conduct us to the investigation of whatever is lawful for us to hold of Him - is the only light which can enable us to discern what we ought to see of Him."¹⁰

The written word is the revelation because it witnesses to Jesus Christ. For Calvin the Incarnate Son is the full and complete revelation of God,

"God is wholly found in Him, so that he who is not content with Christ alone desires something better and more excellent than God. The summary is this: God has manifested Himself to us fully and perfectly in Christ".¹¹

⁵ Inst. 3:24:4.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ CR 54, 57.

⁸ CR 48, 314.

⁹ We are reminded that elsewhere he disallows the pseudo-theology of the Turks and Jews because it makes affirmations about God in Himself apart from revelation.

¹⁰ Inst. 3:21:2.

¹¹ Comm. on Col. 2:9.

But this must not be taken to imply here any more than elsewhere that for Calvin the only possible course is to keep silent. For God declares to us His eternal will in so far as it is necessary.¹² Here Calvin's answer is that "we must heed what we are told in the Gospel"¹³ and "those secrets of His will which God desires to disclose to us, He has revealed in His Word".¹⁴ Theology therefore for Calvin cannot rest on the twin pillars of revelation and speculation. God has spoken - therefore theology must strictly adhere to His Word.

"Then we shall understand that, as soon as we step outside the limits of the Word, we shall stray from the path of truth and wander in darkness, where we shall necessarily fall and stumble. Hence let us keep this well in mind: to aim at reaching some other knowledge of predestination than that which is offered to us in the Word of God is no less nonsensical than to wish to go by an undiscovered way or to see in the dark".¹⁵

It is necessary to ask just what Calvin means when he requires that we should gain our knowledge of the divine purpose solely from the Word. Unquestionably, he is thinking of Holy Scripture. But the fact that he can substitute "Gospel" for Word suggests to us his meaning. He does not see election solely a doctrine we have to extract from Scripture: we have to do with the Word which apprehends us and claims our allegiance. He is directing our attention to the one joyful message which must claim our total obedience. As once with the people of Israel so now with us, God has in Christ concluded a covenant of life; in fact, in Christ He has chosen us before the foundation of the world. When we are grasped by this message of the Bible, when we encounter Jesus Christ at the heart of it, then we know ourselves to be members of His

¹² CR. 51, 282.

¹³ CR. 54, 57.

¹⁴ Inst. 3:21:1.

¹⁵ Inst. 3:21:2.

chosen people: we know that our salvation is grounded uniquely and solely in God.¹⁶

It is in the discussion about God's eternal choice that Calvin proves himself to be not a speculative theologian but a theologian of the Word. And this not simply in that he derives his doctrine of election from the Bible, but in that he constantly points to Christ in the Scriptures who alone is able to assure us of our election. Indeed, his reserved treatment of the problem (placing it after everything else has been said about God, Christ, and the appropriation of salvation) is seen as a warning against a too diffuse discussion which might easily degenerate into mere speculation.

Definition of the Doctrine of predestination:

The clearest "definition" Calvin gives us of predestination is as follows:

"By predestination we mean that eternal decree of God by which He determined with Himself whatever He wished to happen to every man. All are not created on equal terms but some are pre-ordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation; and, accordingly, as each has been created for one or other of these ends, we say that he has been predestined to life or death".¹⁷

Thus Brunner is utterly mistaken in his rash statement that Calvin "never preached the doctrine of double predestination".¹⁸

Barth is nearer the truth when he sees election and rejection in Calvin's thought as tending towards a parallelism, which unconsciously undermines the doctrine of the grace of God.¹⁹

Thus Parker asserts that Calvin was not afraid to declare predestination in an extreme form from the pulpit, but stresses

¹⁶ Wm. Niesel, The Theology of Calvin, Pg. 162.

¹⁷ Inst. 3:21:5.

¹⁸ E. Brunner, The Divine-Human Encounter, Pg. 91.

It is true that Calvin in his sermons always dwells upon election to salvation and is reticent to stress reprobation to damnation, but we do find reprobation taught in his series on Jacob and Esau (CR 58).

¹⁹ K. Barth, Op. Cit., Vol. 2, Pt. 2, Pg. 18.

that he gave it a religious and practical rather than academic significance.²⁰ Calvin therefore definitely teaches a doctrine of double predestination, occasionally even stating that there is no reason why God should not call all men in the same way, except that He chooses to distinguish some from others.²¹ The simple fact is that all men are not called for otherwise why has God not sent men to preach the Gospel to the Turks?²²

Infra- or Supralapsarian?²³:

This is perhaps an illegitimate question to ask, because we should not seek from Calvin decisions about questions which arose in later controversies among seventeenth century exponents of "Calvinism". Calvin, ever imbued with practical religious aims and dogmatic only when authorised by Scripture, seems to have given the question little definite thought.²⁴ We note that he hints at his position several times. His basic definition above and a comment in 3.23.7. seem to point in the direction of Supralapsarianism,

"The decree, I admit, is dreadful; and yet it is impossible to deny that God foreknew what the end of man was to be before He made him, and foreknew, because He had so ordained by His decree.....Nor ought it to seem absurd when I say that God not only foresaw the fall of the first man, and in him the ruin of his posterity; but at His own pleasure arranged it".

Again, Calvin in his Articles on Predestination (refer Pg. 147) is clear that

²⁰ T.H.L. Parker, The Oracles of God, Pg. 84.

²¹ Comm. Ps. 65. 5.

²² Cong. Elec. CR. 8. p.112.

²³ It is commonly held that the Infralapsarians believe that God elected men after the Fall, the Supralapsarians before that event had taken place. Both groups, however, held that God had elected men before the Fall; the Infralapsarians in view of God's foreknowledge of that event, the Supralapsarians believing on the other hand that the Fall was ordained to fulfil the purpose of election and reprobation.

²⁴ A.M. Hunter, The Teaching of Calvin, Pg. 127.

"Before the first man was created God, by an eternal decree, determined what He willed should come to pass for the whole human race.

By this hidden decree of God it was decided that Adam should fall from this perfect state of his nature and should draw all his posterity into the guilt of eternal death".

But it is significant that while the Consensus Genevensis (1552) assumes the supralapsarian point of view, the French Confession, of which Calvin was the most influential compiler and author, is infralapsarian in affirming that God chose out of the universal corruption and damnation in which all men were submerged some to eternal life.²⁵ Further, in discussing the question of how Christ could have been appointed Redeemer before the Fall of Adam, Calvin argues that Christ was so appointed because God foresaw that man would not long remain in his integrity.²⁶ However, for Calvin foreknowledge is nothing more than God's subjective apprehension of what He intends to do - and so this passage cannot properly be quoted as supporting the view that Calvin was Infralapsarian. Possibly the most balanced judgment is that given by Barth when he says "it is difficult and impossible to judge whether he had in mind the alternatives as formulated in the later controversy".²⁷

Reprobation:

Though Calvin may be said to lean towards supralapsarianism and to have taught a definite doctrine of double predestination, nevertheless in some of his writings he indicates that election and reprobation are not equally-balanced movements in the divine will. For example, in his comment on Mark 4:12 he says that the Gospel only accidentally and not

²⁵ It appears that all Calvin was concerned to establish was that the observed division between men into believing and unbelieving was to be traced back through the Fall to the decree of God which brought about the Fall without which His eternal decree of election would have had no point.

²⁶ Comm. I Peter I.20.

²⁷ K. Barth, Op. Cit., Vol.2, Pt. 2, Pg. 127.

by its own nature and intention hardens the reprobate - as the sun is not to be blamed for dimming weak-eyed people's sight when they are brought into the light.²⁸ More significant is the passage where Calvin declares that there is no joy among the angels over the death of a sinner and also when he affirms that God derives no pleasure from the miseries of men, and rejecting as blasphemous the notion of God playing with us as with balls. He further adds that though God punishes men willingly because He is the judge of the world, He does not do this from the heart as He wishes all to be innocent.³⁰

Nevertheless, in contrast there is the stern and unflinching teaching in the Institutes.³¹ Commenting on Paul's reference to Jacob and Esau (Rom. 9.13) he explicitly notes that "the reprobate are expressly raised up, in order that the glory of God might thereby be displayed". The only reason for this reprobation lies in His inscrutable will. The refusal of the reprobate to obey the word of God must be attributed to the depravity of their hearts, but it must also be remembered that in "the inscrutable judgement of God" they were created to reveal His glory in their condemnation.³² When objection is raised against this doctrine Calvin refers us to Augustine's contention that "it is perverse to measure divine by the standard of human justice".³³ To the charge that it would enhance His glory more to save all men, Calvin replies that reprobation is required so as to exhibit all the glory of God's nature. Without reprobation in addition to election the greatness of His mercy would never appear. His justice in repro-

²⁸ Comm. Mk. 4.12.

²⁹ Comm. Isa. 1.21.

³⁰ Comm. Lam. 3.33.

I am grateful to Russell for these last three quotations.

³¹ Inst. 3.22.11.

³² Inst. 3.24.14.

³³ Inst. 3.24.17.

bation maintains His righteousness and throws into relief the depth of His mercy in election and salvation. If some "are doomed from the womb to certain death"³⁴ it follows, he avers, that they must "glorify God by their destruction".³⁵

Calvin himself asks the pertinent question whether it is understandable that God from eternity has destined some to death who, because they were not yet born, had not been able to earn the judgement to death?³⁶ Clearly he is faced with the problem of causality here. Is predestination apart from guilt? Here he stresses two points: eternal death through God's judgement, and man's own nature that leads him to this judgement.

Strikingly, Calvin repeatedly points to the actual situation of sinful man before God.³⁷ Predestination can never serve to take away man's sin, "which engraven on their own consciences, is ever and anon presenting itself to their view".³⁸ Calvin recognises God's absolute predestination but paradoxically looks for another cause: "Though their perdition depends on the predestination of God, the cause and matter of it is in themselves".³⁹ On occasions he declares that the cause of reprobation lies with man and yet also with God; but it is clear that he does not regard these as two equivalent ontological causae. His problem is to reconcile God's counsel and man's sin. He will not withdraw man's destination from God's counsel, yet he points concretely at man standing in opposition to God. Calvin constantly implies that rejection in God's

³⁴ In accordance with Calvin's understanding Prov. 16.4, Romans 9:13ff.

³⁵ Inst. 3.22.11; 3.23.6 ; 3.23.8 ; 3.24.2 ; 3.24.14.

³⁶ Inst. 3:23.3.

³⁷ G.C. Berkouwer, Divine Election, Pg. 186.

³⁸ Inst. 3.23.3.

³⁹ Inst. 3.23.8.

judgement is unthinkable without preceding sin.⁴⁰

But Calvin clearly sees the ultimate cause of reprobation in predestination, certainly so in his commentary on Romans 11:7:

"For what Paul means of the reprobate is this - that the beginning of their ruin and condemnation is from this - that they are forsaken by God".

Paul refers many times to man's blindness and stubbornness as scourges of God with which He punishes crimes already committed, but Calvin does not understand these passages as indicating a connection between crime and punishment. According to him, Paul really wants to prove that "not those were blinded who so deserved by their wickedness, but who were rejected by God before the foundation of the world". The first and real cause for Calvin is and remains God's predestination as rejection and the cause in man is subordinate.⁴¹

Calvin's chronic vacillation shows that an acceptable solution can never be reached by means of the concept of cause, for this invariably leads to a causal determination and necessity, and this produces fear and uncertainty unknown to the Apostolic writers. Calvin is himself embarrassed by his logic. Thus, repeatedly he emphatically rejects fatalism and insists on sin as the "real cause of judgement. Calvin declares that nothing occurs apart from God's counsel and sovereign act, but in the same breath speaks seriously and existentially of sin as the real cause. This is so real and concrete to Calvin that he asks: "Why should man still seek that cause in heaven?"⁴² Calvin does not allow himself to be diverted from the existential reality - man before God as sinner - and he points to sin as the cause of judgement.

Calvin, however, has spoken without hesitation of the reprobate as "the vessels of wrath" made for destruction, already predestined before their birth. They are in fact

⁴⁰ G.C. Berkouwer, Op. Cit., Pg. 187.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² G.C. Berkouwer, Op. Cit., Pg. 189.

"hateful to God".⁴³ In Romans 9:22 we are not told why they are such vessels but this is because the reason is hidden in the counsel of God.⁴⁴ It must be said that many scholars do not agree with Calvin's exegesis of this passage, not as wishing to minimize the sovereignty of God but because they recognise that Paul's words cannot legitimately bear this interpretation. Romans 9 to 11 is not an independent analysis of the destiny of individual man; it shows, rather, the acts of the electing God through the course of history. Any individualistic interpretation of these three chapters, containing Paul's "philosophy of history", will mutilate the real purpose of the Apostle in explaining the part played by the Israelite nation or a minority of it in the divine plan for salvation. His purpose is not to explain the decisions made in the eternal counsels of God about the destinies of individual men but how, now that Christ has come, the Jews fit into God's purpose for the salvation of the world.

We cannot, however, be satisfied with Calvin's doctrine of reprobation, as it leads to perplexing difficulties. The simple question, "Is it just to punish men for what they cannot help?" constantly obtrudes to embarrass him. Calvin has in fact taken up two irreconcilable positions - a man cannot help being what he is and incurs the penalty attached to his inevitable sin, but must be regarded also as responsible for his sin and therefore meriting condemnation. Calvin found the "solution" in his view of the human will.⁴⁵ With the Fall of Adam man's whole nature became corrupt, and within it his will. Man thereafter no longer possesses the capacity to choose between good and evil, for his choice is predetermined by his nature as

⁴³ Inst. 3.24.17.

⁴⁴ Comm. on Romans 9:22.

⁴⁵ J.B. Mozley, The Augustinian Doctrine of Predestination,
note xxi.

"wholly under sin". The enslaved will held captive by the corrupt nature can only choose evil, yet man must still be held responsible for the sins he commits inasmuch as they are decisions of his own will. Man is under no outward compulsion or necessity to sin, but of his own will yields to the overwhelming compulsions of his nature. Here Calvin followed chiefly the lead of Augustine, his primary extra-canonical authority. This is, however, only an apparent solution, since we are finally driven back to the divine decree which ordained the Fall of Adam and which therefore points to divine responsibility for the whole chain of events.

Thus Calvin is logically correct granted his premiss that every act of God manifests the divine glory but Scripturally absurd, when he declares that reprobation glorifies God as much as election.

A further basic weakness in this reasoning is that it points to a God who is not the God we meet in Christ. Calvin errs in his analysis of the Divine nature, because he sets mercy and righteousness in antithesis. In election God is seen as merciful and in reprobation He is seen as just. Calvin has failed to take seriously that God is love, although he would vigorously protest at this charge by maintaining that he is constantly amazed that God in His love should choose any to salvation. Nevertheless, he does not see clearly that love is the one quality predicated of God that He is (I Jn.4.8), and that His other attributes (mercy and righteousness, for example) have love as their foundation. God's love is never parallel or subordinated to His righteousness, as two separate parts of His nature. His love is a holy love and all His acts flow from it.

Calvin's view of reprobation bringing glory to God leads further to a forced exegesis of such texts as Ezek. 18:23, when he suggests that insofar as God offers pardon to a sinner, even without the gift of repentance, He does not will that

sinner's death.⁴⁶ Previously we mentioned his similar treatment to Augustine of I Tim. 2.4 where "all" is interpreted to mean every class of person (Pg. 47). In fairness to Calvin we must say that placed in its strict context it appears to be just as worthy an interpretation as that of those who would use the passages to overthrow the doctrine of double predestination. Neither can we call his exegesis of Ex. 32:31 unjustifiable, when he says that here Moses spoke out of the vehemence of his feelings and therefore the verse does not imply that the Book of life could be in any way altered.⁴⁷ Yet, while it must be admitted that Calvin generally does face fairly the passages in the Bible which militate against him, nevertheless his whole approach is strained, for it is obviously, ^{contrary} to the dominant theme of Biblical thought. Calvin himself acknowledges the awfulness of this doctrine,

"It is an awesome decree (decretum horribile) but no one can deny that God foreknew the future final fate of man before He created him, and that He did foreknow it because it was appointed by His own decree".⁴⁸

This unflinching logic of double predestination is not typical of Scripture taken as a whole for nowhere is the "decretum horribile" asserted. Calvin is really basing his teaching not directly on Scripture but on a logical syllogism: "if there be election there must be rejection; there must be eternal predestination to perdition".⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Inst. 3.24.15 Text: "Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked....and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?".

⁴⁷ Comm. on Ex. 32:31.

⁴⁸ Inst. 3.23.7.

⁴⁹ J.S. Whale, The Protestant Tradition, Pg. 143.

Effectual Calling:(i) The Covenant.

Calvin is convinced that God has made only one covenant with mankind, that with Abraham, although its dispensations are different. At the same time he is careful to point out that the root of the covenant is in Christ not Abraham.⁵⁰ Though belonging to the covenant people, whether Israel or the Church, one possesses the outward marks of adoption.⁵¹ The Jews, though they were naturally cursed because they belonged to the seed of Adam, yet by the privilege of the covenant became exempt from this curse, though many of them fell away by unbelief.⁵²

Calvin's position in regard to election to the covenant is briefly set forth in the Commentary on Hosea 12:3-5:

"That God's election of this people was a double election; one was a general election and the other a specific election. A specific election was that of the holy man, Jacob, for truly he was one of God's sons; a further specific election was of those called by Paul 'the children of promise'. There was also a general election which Jacob's whole seed received by his faith, and his covenant was brought forward to all. Meanwhile, all were not regenerate; not all were given the adoption of the Spirit. Thus general election was not efficacious for all."

Within the covenant regenerating grace was efficacious only in those who were elected to salvation.⁵³ God works in His elect in two ways: inwardly, by His Spirit; outwardly, by His Word.

"By His Spirit illuminating their minds, and training their hearts to the practise of righteousness, He makes them new creatures, while, by His Word, He stimulates them to long and seek for this renovation".⁵⁴

In the words of Christ, "Many are called, but few are chosen!"⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Comm. Ex. 4.22.

⁵¹ Comm. Jer. 31.31-32.

⁵² Comm. Eze. 16.21.

⁵³ Grace is for Calvin not a power or a substance: it is the gift of God, Jesus Christ.

⁵⁴ Inst. 2.5.5.

⁵⁵ Matt. 22:14.

Calvin finds proof for two species of calling:

"...there is a universal call, by which God, through the external preaching of the word invites all men alike, even those for whom He designs the call to be a savour of death, and the ground of a severer condemnation. Besides this there is a special call which, for the most part, God bestows on believers only, when by the internal illumination of the Spirit He causes the word preached to take deep root in their hearts".⁵⁶

Yet there is also another mode of divine activity among those who belong to the covenant-people, but are not necessarily elected for salvation.

"The external invitation, without the internal efficacy of grace which would have the effect of retaining them, holds a kind of middle place between the rejection of the human race and the election of a small number of believers".⁵⁷

There is really no reason why God should not illumine the minds of these non-elect with some sparks from His light and grant to them some perception of His goodness⁵⁸; nevertheless such faith as they do possess is a result of compulsion, that knowing the power of God they are forced to show some reverence towards Him.⁵⁹ Calvin appeals in both these passages to Mark 4.17 as his biblical authority for recognising such a form of temporary faith.

The distinction between the elect and the non-elect in the Church is therefore that the elect have received a true inward call from God, while the non-elect have only heard the outward offer of the Gospel made to all men.⁶⁰ The invitation is given to all men, but only the sound enters the hearts of some.⁶¹ It is always necessary for God to open men's hearts if they are to be saved; nevertheless the unbeliever at least

⁵⁶ Inst. 3.24.8.

⁵⁷ Inst. 3.21.7.

⁵⁸ Comm. Heb. 6.4.

⁵⁹ Comm. Ps. 106.12.

⁶⁰ Comm. Joel. 2.32.

⁶¹ Comm. on Ps. 81.14.

will know enough of the Gospel to be rendered without excuse.⁶²
 The preaching of the Gospel to the unbelieving brings into relief their wilful stubbornness against God and so renders them the more inexcusable.⁶³

Calvin was well aware of the criticism which could be made against his doctrine of the universal offer of the Gospel, and the secret effectual call to the elect alone. Such a view seemed to pose two wills in God. He admits this, but says that at the Last Day we shall be able to see how the seemingly divergent operations of the will of God are really one in purpose⁶⁴ - the problem is capable only of an eschatological solution.

(ii) Four signs of Vocation:

The importance of the effectual call for Calvin cannot be over-emphasised for "the special election which otherwise would remain hidden in God, He at length manifests by His calling."⁶⁵ While Calvin is reproached by the uninformed for his concern with predestination, we find that he in fact warns us that to enquire of predestination is to "infect" our spirits with "the most pestilential error", for we can only "trouble our conscience". In fact to be pre-occupied with one's election is a temptation of the devil. Thus

"When a poor man endeavours to enter the incomprehensible secrets of the divine wisdom to know what has been ordained for him by the judgements of God from the beginning of eternity he throws himself into a deep gulf to drown himself; he tangles himself as in traps of which he will never be able to come out and enters an abyss of darkness out of which he will never emerge".⁶⁶

62 Inst. 3.24.13.

63 Sermon on Job 36.15-19.

64 Comm. Matt. 23:37.

65 Inst. 3.24.1.

66 Quoted from Doumergue.

Lest we lose ourselves in endless speculation Calvin is concerned to point us to our vocation which has definite signs. According to Doumergue there are four signs presented to us.

Firstly, we are to concern ourselves with the Gospel and the preaching of the Word for

"to be certain of our salvation we must begin with the Word and all our confidence must rest and lean upon it, to invoke God our Father".⁶⁷

Then we are directed to

"look at the Gospel which is put before us. There God shows that He is Father and that He has marked us out so as to bring us the heritage of life. This knowledge is the signature of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, a sure witness of our salvation".⁶⁸

The second sign is Christ Himself. Here Calvin is quite convinced that the heart of the Gospel is not an uncertain determinism but Christ Himself. For "if we seek for the paternal mercy and favour of God, we must turn our eyes to Christ, in whom alone the Father is well pleased".⁶⁹ Calvin is certain that

"if we are elected in Christ, we cannot find the certainty of our election in ourselves; and not even in God the Father if we look at Him apart from the Son. Christ, then is the mirror in which we ought and in which, without deception, we may contemplate our election".⁷⁰

for it is unquestionable that "if we are in communion with Christ, we have proof clear and strong that we are written in the Book of life".⁷¹ If we are concerned about our eternal salvation we are to ask "whether God has committed us to Christ, whom He has appointed to be the only Saviour of His people". Calvin urges men to ratify their election by "embracing Christ, who is kindly offered to us and comes forth to meet us: He will

⁶⁷ Inst. 3.24.3.

⁶⁸ Opera Omnia 54:55.

⁶⁹ Inst. 3.24.5.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Inst. 3.24.5.

number us among His flock and keep us within His fold".⁷² A notable feature in his dealing with effectual calling is the constant reference to Christ. By this he attempts to avoid two errors; firstly, our falling into depression when contemplating the eternal decision of God regarding our destiny and secondly, our relapsing into despair when considering our sinful state.

However, neither the Gospel nor Christ are in themselves guarantees of our vocation, for God teaches His elect effectually only when "He brings them to faith". Faith is the "infallible mark that God takes us for His children".⁷³ It is in his concern for faith that the objective character of true Calvinism is seen, for faith is

"a work of God by which He shows that we are His people and appoints His Son to be the protector of our salvation..."⁷⁴

We must not forget that if faith is an infallible sign of vocation it is because it is a gift of God, which God gives only to the elect:

"Faith is a special gift of God which proceeds not from our free -will but as it pleases God to reveal His secrets to those whom He has elected".⁷⁵

We need this gift to take hold of Christ effectively, and truly to hear the Word. Salvation then is a work of pure grace; the human will contributes nothing of itself toward the event.⁷⁶ Nevertheless regeneration does take place through the human will:

"Now there is no objection to its being quite properly said of us that the Spirit of God is active within us, although our will of itself contributes nothing if so be that grace is separated from it".⁷⁷

⁷² Inst. 3.24.6.

⁷³ Opera Omnia 54:56.

⁷⁴ Comm. John 6.38.

⁷⁵ Opera Omnia 58:52 (13 Sermons on Jacob and Esau).

⁷⁶ Inst. 2.3.8,9.

⁷⁷ Inst. 2.5.15.

The will of the elect cannot resist grace, saving grace by its very nature being efficacious.⁷⁸ On the classic text, "For by grace are ye saved through faith and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2.8) Calvin comments:

"First, Paul asserts, that the salvation of the Ephesians was entirely the work, the gracious work of God. But then they had obtained this grace by faith. On one side, we must look at God; and, on the other, at man. God declares that He owes us nothing; so that salvation is not a reward or recompense, but unmixed grace in what way do men receive that salvation offered to them by the hand of God? The answer is, by faith; and hence he concludes that nothing connected with it is our own. If, on the part of God, it is grace alone, and if we bring nothing but faith, which strips us of all condemnation, it follows that salvation does not come from us Faith, then, brings a man empty to God that he may be filled with all the blessings of Christ. And so he adds, not of yourselves; that claiming nothing for themselves, they may acknowledge God alone as the author of their salvation".⁷⁹

The reprobate hear the Word and learn of Christ together with the elect but between them there is the difference of faith. Only in the elect do we find "such confidence of heart by which we say that our election is certified to us".⁸⁰

The fourth sign, according to Doumergue, is sanctification where election is certified to us by the fruits of our renewed lives. Over this "syllogismus practicus" there is much dispute. Niesel is adamant that there is not only no trace of the "syllogismus practicus" in Calvin but that he warns against it. For this implies that our view is deflected from God, who is to be found in Christ alone, and is turned towards man. By such a proceeding the hope of salvation is not increased but rather imperilled.⁸¹ Barth disagrees, for he finds evidence of it in Calvin. Certainly, Barth affirms, Christ is the one, true, and decisive foundation for our certainty, but the believer receives assurance of this foundation "in the form of

⁷⁸ Inst. 2.3.10.

⁷⁹ Comm. Eph. 2.8.

⁸⁰ Inst. 3:24:7.

⁸¹ Wm. Niesel, Op.Cit., Pg. 181.

his own decision, of his own faith, and confession, and of his own corresponding existence". According to Barth the life of faith becomes a testimony to faith.⁸² It appears that Barth is correct for Calvin's commentary on I John 3.14 tells us "the apostle commends to us the virtue of love because it is a testimony⁸³ of our transition from death to life".

⁸² K. Barth, Op. Cit., Pgs. 369-370.

⁸³ Italics mine.

CHAPTER SIX.
CALVIN'S DOCTRINE OF ELECTION (Continued)

The superficial criticism is often leveled at Calvin that if predestination to eternal life is dependent on the will of God alone there is therefore no need of Christ and the Church. This is to misunderstand his thought completely. The Church is part of God's ordained plan and purpose for the redemption of His elect. It is important to understand that for Calvin the means to eternal life are as much a part of God's predestination as the end itself. We are thus brought to a consideration of Calvin's doctrine of the Church in relation to God's eternal election.

Election and the Church:

In the final edition of the Institutes the doctrine of the Church follows logically discussion of the redemption wrought by Christ and its attainment through the Holy Spirit.

On account of the strong tension within him between the ideal and the actual Church, Calvin tends to vacillate between three different positions which strictly are not compatible with each other. He conceives of the Church primarily as the invisible company of the elect, and beyond the possibility of precise definition by men: this was his heritage from Augustine. Again, he conceives of the Church as the visible Church of believers, recognisable by the preaching and hearing of the Word and participation in the Sacraments: this was his heritage from Luther. Further, as an idealist and puritan, he thinks of the Church in terms of Christian perfection and insists on discipline and even excommunication in the interests of that holiness without which no man shall see the Lord: this was his heritage from practical experience.¹

¹ J.S. Whale, The Protestant Tradition, Pg. 151.

Foremost in his definitions is the Church as the totality of all the predestinated,

"It comprehends not only the saints who dwell upon earth, but all the elect who have existed from the beginning of the world".²

This co-ordination of the elect and the sanctified is quite in accordance with Calvin's thought which sees election realised in the individual through sanctification. This is clearly referred to in his most important polemic on predestination³:

"The sanctity which was to be in the elect had its beginning by election.....they are simultaneous and inseparable things, that God has elected us and now calls us to sanctity. ...we must not separate what is identified and united..... election ought to be like a root which brings forth good fruits".

In his first edition of the Institutes when he comes to deal with the fourth article of the Creed, Calvin defines the holy Church as identical with,

"the whole number of the elect whether they are angels or men, whether they are dead or whether they still live, in whatsoever lands they live or among whatever peoples they are dispersed".

The novelty in this comprehensive definition is its emphasis on election as the constitutive essence of the Church, hardly, if ever, found in previous expositions of the Creed. At this point Calvin has returned through many centuries to Augustine in defining the Church as the "number of the elect".

This view of the Church establishes the ground of Christian assurance:

"But since the Church is the people of the elect of God, it cannot be that those who are truly members should perish finally or be lost in eternal ruin. For their salvation rests on such certain and solid foundations that even if the whole frame of the world should be destroyed, it could not fall nor collapse. First, it stands by God's election and cannot change nor fail, save with that eternal wisdom. They can therefore stumble and waver, they can even fall, but they are not crushed for God puts out His hand. This is what St. Paul says, that 'the gifts and calling of God are without

² Inst. 4.1, 2,7.

³ De. aet. Dei. praed., CR. 8, 318.

repentance'. Then those whom God has chosen He has entrusted to Christ, His Son, in confidence that He might loose none of them, but might raise them all up in the last day".⁴

Again, the Church as the total number of the elect is invisible and an object of faith. This must not be taken to imply that Calvin intended thereby to loosen our connection with the historic Church. Brunner has severely criticised Calvin's concept of the Church as being "fundamentally individualistic in outlook"⁵ for in the last resort Calvin means by the Church simply the "ecclesia invisibilis", while the visible Church is relegated to the dubious category of "an external means of salvation".⁶ The idea of an invisible Church is foreign to the New Testament. Also alien to it is the interpretation of the real visible Church as merely an external means of salvation.⁷ From the point of view of the New Testament "ecclesia" the thought of Calvin that the Church is an external support for faith is unintelligible. The "ecclesia" here regards itself as the Body of Christ, as divine revelation and salvation in action, and therefore never to be thought of as a means to an end, but as an end in itself.

In spite of these valid criticisms Calvin is nevertheless the "Cyprian of the Reformation era"⁸, since the visible institutions of the Church - its Scriptures, sacraments, ministry and discipline - remain as an indispensable means of grace. This is the channel whereby the eternal decree of God is expressed and realised in historic time. The crucified and risen Redeemer is not rendered superfluous by predestinating grace,

⁴ Quoted by K. Barth, Op. Cit., Pg. 82.

⁵ E. Brunner, The Misunderstanding of the Church, Pg. 9.

⁶ Inst. 1.1.1,5.

⁷ cf. A. van Selms, The Communion of Saints and the Colour Problem, an article in Delayed Action, for a repudiation of the Church as "invisible".

⁸ J.S. Whale, Op. Cit., Pg. 161.

but is the supreme means of that grace. As Prophet, Priest, and King⁹ the Incarnate Son is the actualisation in time of the Father's eternal will to save us. The Church is thus indispensable to salvation as His outward and visible Body. One reference suffices to reveal Calvin's mind on the necessity of the Church in the life of the elect:

"It is not enough to embrace with the mind and spirit the assembly of the elect. There is no entering into life unless the Church conceives us in her womb, brings us to birth, nourishes us in her bosom and preserves us by her guardianship and discipline no forgiveness of sins is to be hoped for beyond her embrace, nor any salvation".¹⁰

We must view Calvin's words "the secret choice of God is the foundation of the Church" as a weapon to be used against all claims to merit and self praise. For those who exult in the historical development and impressive structure of the Church without accepting that they are dependent on the grace of Christ these words are like a sharp sword. The thought of election by divine grace deprives the Church of all self-security and power, but precisely in so doing forces it back upon God and thereby strengthens it for work in the world.

Election and the Sacraments:

Related to the doctrine of the Church is, of course, Calvin's understanding of the sacraments. This is clearly expressed in the Consensus Tigurinus (1549) which appeared under his influence, setting forth the doctrine of the sacraments as agreed upon by the churches of Zurich and Geneva. Article 16 headed All who partake of the sacraments do not partake of the reality reads:

"Besides, we carefully teach that God does not exert His power indiscriminately in all who receive the sacraments, but only in the elect. For as He enlightens unto

⁹ Calvin was the author of this formula of the three offices of Christ.
cf. J.F. Jansen, Calvin's Doctrine of the Work of Christ where he expounds this theme.

¹⁰ Inst. 4.1.4.

faith none but those whom He hath foreordained to life, so by the secret agency of His Spirit he makes the elect receive what the sacraments offer".¹¹

Calvin's exposition of this article merely serves to shed light on the basic ideas contained in it. It is "to the elect only, to whom the inward and effectual working of the Spirit is applied" that the signs are effectual. In fact, if any would make the effect common to all, "he is not only refuted by the testimony of Scripture but by experience". Augustine is quoted to refute the objection that because the benefits of the Supper are useful for the elect only they are therefore diminished in power or their force impaired. Augustine in fact affirms that the benefit is not common to all because the unbelief of the reprobate prevents them from obtaining benefit from the sign: "the whole blame therefore resides in themselves".¹² Calvin goes so far as to say "that the body and blood of Christ are as truly given to the unworthy as to the elect faithful of God".¹³ Christ, however, does not cause His Spirit to move within them in the same way in which He accomplishes His work on the elect of God, incorporating them into Christ.¹⁴ Similarly, in baptism a real divine energy is connected with the administration of the water. The Holy Spirit, however, is not involved mechanically in the external ceremony - He is present and effective only in those who are elected.

Election and Scripture.

We need to notice briefly the relation between the elect and the Holy Scriptures. The Bible exists for the sake of the elect; for their benefit it was divinely given and inspired.

¹¹ J. Calvin, Tracts and Treatises on the Doctrine and Worship of the Church, Vol. 2, Pg. 217. ed. by T.F. Torrance.

¹² Ibid. Pg. 231-232.

¹³ Inst. 4.17.33.

¹⁴ Wm. Niesel, The Theology of Calvin, Pg. 227.

But they are enabled to hear and understand the Word of God, because of the gift of the Spirit in their hearts who interprets the meaning and certifies its authority to them. Calvin believes that secondary arguments relating to the majesty of Scripture, its style and composition, can be of use in establishing that there is a God but a true conviction of the Scriptures' authenticity rests not on human judgements or reasons for this is the work of the Spirit of God in the elect.¹⁵

Election and Christ:

The main question, however, which we must ask concerning Calvin's doctrine of predestination is how far it is related to the work of Christ and especially to His historic mission. The acid test for any doctrine of election is the place it assigns to Christ in its formulation. The New Testament sees election closely bound up with Jesus Christ and therefore always historical in character. The only passage in the New Testament where election is explicitly stated to have its roots in eternity is Ephesians I:4f. where we have the words "before the foundation of the world" (See Pg.129 for an exposition of these words); and yet even this does not deprive us of the historical character of being founded on Jesus Christ, "He chose us in Him".

Barth has observed that Calvin and Reformed theology in general have appreciated the deep connection between election and Christ, particularly when confronted with Ephesians I:4f. which speaks about our election in Christ.¹⁶ He recognises that Calvin's insistence on Christ as "the mirror of election" was a pastoral injunction to urge believers to seek refuge in Jesus Christ alone in order to come to the certainty of their election and salvation. He is, however, not fully satisfied

¹⁵ A. Dakin, Calvinism, Pg. 198.

¹⁶ G.C.Berkouwer, The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth, Pg. 84.

here because he suspects this pastoral exhortation serves as a protection against the fact of the "deus absconditus" whose secret will is hidden to us. He sees that to insist on looking to Christ cannot exclude a decision of God which precedes election in Christ and that this is the real, the deepest, and the hidden decision of God. He further suspects there is a prior decree of election afterwards brought to realisation in the work of Christ, where Christ becomes merely the means for its effectuation.

Torrance, on the other hand, has asserted that Barth has not done justice to Calvin in accusing him of abstraction at this point.¹⁷ In discussing whether Calvin conceived election to be an act of God within His own eternity only, in abstraction from the existence and life of Jesus Christ, or conceived it to be only and fully in Jesus Christ, he maintains we must keep before us the following facts.

Calvin, he is convinced, not only thinks of election in Christ but also of Christ as the Elect One or the object of election in time. Further, Calvin attempted to resist the idea that election reposes upon some sort of darkness behind the revealed God, and therefore taught that at no point is natural theology more harmful than here, in its attempt to know God behind the back of Christ. He also saw that the positive will of God is His will for our salvation. Christ came to save not to condemn - but if men are blinded or slain by the Gospel this can only be regarded, as Calvin stated times without number, as "accidental" or "adventitious". Therefore Torrance believes we may not think of election and reprobation in equilibrium; the deliberate unbalance means that Calvin refused to think out the problem of election logically or systematically. This is why he refused also to agree that the negative result, condemnation or reprobation, should be inserted into Creed,

¹⁷ T.F. Torrance, The School of Faith, Pg. lxxvii.

Confession, or Catechism where only the positive affirmation of faith belongs. Thus in the Catechism, for example, he does not obtrude the doctrine of election; it receives merely incidental mention.

While Torrance's remarks are an attempt to rescue Calvin from superficial criticism and to appreciate his pastoral motives here, nevertheless, he resorts to a certain amount of special pleading evident when we recollect Calvin's teaching on reprobation at which we have already looked. Even Torrance admits that,

"...there is a problem here, particularly in Calvin's polemical works in defence of predestination, for there is a tendency in them toward abstracting the work of God in election from the work of Christ. At any rate there is no outright identification of the eternal decree of God with His eternal Word. But what decree of God is there which is not also His Word, and the very Word Who was made flesh in Jesus Christ?"¹⁸

A further judgement on Calvin's ambiguity is revealed in the process of abstraction which developed in the later Reformed doctrine of God. Consequently the doctrine of God tended to be formulated independently, with the knowledge of God revealed in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ added at a later stage.

It is necessary for us now to examine three aspects of Calvin's treatment: (a) the relation of those elected to Christ.

(b) Christ's part in their election.¹⁹

(c) Christ's work and the elect.

(a) Calvin possessed a strong sense of unity between Christ and His members; to be saved was to be engrafted into the body of Christ.²⁰ God in His secret counsel "elects us into the body of Christ".²¹ "We are by nature barren and dry except

¹⁸ T.F. Torrance, Op. Cit., Pg. lxxviii.

¹⁹ I am grateful for a number of insights here to an article by J.K.S. Reid, The Office of Christ in Predestination, S.J.T. Vol. I. 1948.

²⁰ Inst. 3.2.30.

²¹ Comm. on Rom. 5.10.

in so far as we have been engrafted into Christ and draw a power which is new and proceeds from Him".²² The idea of unity between Christ and His people reaches supreme expression in certain of Calvin's remarks upon the suffering of Christ. Not only does Christ suffer daily in His member, he avers, but the sufferings of the members are the extension to them of the privilege of sharing in His.²³

In the Institutes the relation of the elect to Christ is expounded in so far as possible in terms of Holy Scripture. The elect are given to Christ, and in His keeping they are safe: "This is the Father's will, that of all which He has given Me, I should lose nothing".²⁴ An advance is made when the elect are referred to as "members of Christ" for it is "in the Head" that "the Heavenly Father has bound His elect to each other and united them to Himself in an indissoluble bond".²⁵ Here there is a suggestion which has to wait for expression later, that the election of His members occurs in the election of Christ their Head. But at this point Calvin does not dwell on Christ's role.

Concerning the assurance of the elect, Calvin again directs their attention to Christ Himself:

"Nor do I send men off to the secret election of God to look for the salvation for which they yearn, but I bid them go straight to Christ in whom salvation is put before us, which otherwise would be hidden in God. For whoever does not enter by the plain road of faith to him the election of God will be nothing but a disastrous labyrinth".²⁶

Further in an attempt to dissolve uncertainty and doubt he directs:

"That we may have the assurance of the remission of our sins, that our consciences may repose in the assurance of eternal life, that we may fearlessly call God our Father, we must by no means begin with what God decreed

²² Comm. on John. 15.1.

²³ Comm. on Col. 1.24.

²⁴ John 6:39 ; Inst. 3.23.10.

²⁵ Inst. 3.21.7.

²⁶ De. aet. Dei. praed. CR.8, 306f.

concerning us before the foundation of the world, but what is made known to us in Christ of His fatherly love and what Christ Himself daily preaches to us by the Gospel".²⁷

The substitutionary character of Calvin's theology is markedly revealed in the Congregation on Election, where it is of marked significance that God could only accept His people in Christ, and therefore we are elected in Him not in ourselves.²⁸ Election in Christ is synonymous with adoption in Him because

"Those who by faith truly communicate in Jesus Christ may be well assured that they belong to the eternal election of God and are His children".²⁹

The fact that we are elected "in Christ" is indeed the great proof that we are unworthy to be elected in ourselves.³⁰ Our situation is so desperate that "in ourselves we are hated and are worthy that God should hold us in abomination; but He looks upon us in His Son and then He loves us".³¹ Further, to prevent our eyes from being turned inwards, we are assured that

"Those whom God has assumed for sons, He is said to have chosen not in themselves but in His Christ, for He could not love them save in Him nor honour them with the inheritance of His kingdom unless they had first been made sharers of Him. If therefore we are elect in Him we shall not find in ourselves the certitude of election".³²

(b) Next we turn to Christ's part in election as seen by Calvin. In the Institutes he uses a variety of expressions to explain this.

Most general of all, Christ, as "the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world", is the direction from which salvation comes. Further, He is represented as the testimony of election.³³ Calvin, referring to Luke 10.20, says

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Inst. 3.24.5.

²⁹ Congregation on Election, CR. 8, 114.

³⁰ Comm. on Eph. 1.4.

³¹ Congregation on Election, CR. 8, 95.

³² Inst. 3.24.5.

³³ Inst. 3.24.9.

"We know from the testimony of Christ that the names of God's children have been written in the book of life from the beginning".

Then Christ is represented as the conveyor of grace, in virtue of which election takes place, without any consideration of human merit:

"Who has called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to His own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began".³⁴

Again, Christ is represented as the source of the assurance of election. The soul's "restless curiosity" and "fatigue" is allayed and relieved since "repose and tranquillity" is offered to those who belong to Him. Thus,

"....the persons whom God has adopted as His children, He is said to have chosen, not in themselves, but in Christ; because it was impossible for him to love them, except in Him; or to honour them with the inheritance of His kingdom, unless previously made partakers of Him".³⁵

If we are concerned about our salvation we are to "inquire whether He has committed us to Christ, the only Saviour of His people".³⁶

Up to this point in the Institutes, the role of Christ in election has not been fully defined. It has been steadily maintained that election is by means of Christ, but the precise part He plays has not come to expression. The following roles indicate more specifically His function.

Christ is the bearer of the message which divides definitely between the elect and the non-elect. It is around Him that the world divides, for He is the watershed around which men take up their positions facing one another. Thus, "Christ commands men to believe in Him....". Yet Calvin is equally convinced that there is nothing contrary to this command in the statement: "No man can come unto me, except it were given Him

³⁴ 2 Tim. 1:9 ; Inst. 3.22.2.

³⁵ Inst. 3.24.5.

³⁶ Inst. 3.24.6.

of my Father".³⁷ Commenting on the words, "Who hath ears to hear, let him hear"³⁸ he says,

"therefore when we exhort and preach, persons endued with ears readily obey; and those who are destitute of them exhibit an accomplishment of Scripture, that hearing they hear not".

Further, Christ is declared to be the seal of our election in another definition:

"Christ is therefore said to manifest the name of the Father to us because by His Spirit He seals on our hearts the knowledge of our election testified to us by the voice of the Gospel".³⁹

The favourite expression for Calvin, taken directly from Augustine, is Christ as "the bright mirror of the eternal and hidden election of God".⁴⁰ This and similar statements recur frequently. He is "the most excellent luminary of grace and predestination"⁴¹ for certainly the only-begotten Son of God did not acquire this dignity by anything He did or believed. It is by grace that He is the Son of God. Predestination in fact shines brightest in the Saint of saints - no more splendid mirror of predestination exists than in the Mediator Himself, who attained without merit such honour as to be the only-begotten Son of God.⁴² He is "the mirror to which we must lift up our eyes if we desire the certainty of our election"⁴³, "the mirror in which the will of God becomes visible to us and the pledge by which it is sealed".⁴⁴ Christ therefore is the place where we see reflected the election which singles out certain members of mankind.

Christ, however, performs more than this passive role

³⁷ John 6:65 ; Inst. 3.23.13.

³⁸ Matt. 23.9.

³⁹ De. aet. Dei praed. VIII. 6.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid. VI.

⁴² Ibid. VIII. 6.

⁴³ C.R. 51:282 ; 42:127,131.

⁴⁴ C.R. 5:333

because He is not just the ground of our recognition of our election; He is also its objective ground and source. This leads to assigning Christ the most promising and effective role in the Institutes but it is unfortunately never developed or mentioned again. Christ is here referred to as "the author of election".⁴⁵ This is a right which He claims for Himself:

"though Christ introduces Himself in His mediatorial capacity, yet He claims to Himself the right of election", and this apparently on equal terms with the Father, for Calvin adds, "the right of election in common with the Father". This is a remarkable statement, and if it had been further developed by Calvin or later Calvinist divines would have prevented much unnecessary argument.⁴⁶

(c) We must further ask how far election is concerned with the work of the Son.

Acts 2.23, Calvin points out⁴⁷, declares that Christ was delivered to death by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. The death was carried out by the violence of men, but it was none the less ordained by the eternal decree of God. In his commentary on Acts 20:21, Calvin declares that no part of our salvation may not be found in Christ, yet in the list which follows election is noticeably missing.⁴⁸ In discussing salvation under the scholastic terminology of efficient, material, formal, and final causes, he only allows Christ to be the second of these: the efficient cause is the good pleasure of the will of God.⁴⁹ Calvin's solution to what part Christ played in the work of election is perhaps basically similar to that of Augustine - election is part of the work of the disincarnate

⁴⁵ Inst. 3.22.7.

⁴⁶ We see this aspect strongly emphasised today in Barth's treatment of election where Christ is not only the Elected One but also the One who elects.

⁴⁷ De aet. Dei. praed. V. 1.

⁴⁸ Comm. Acts 20.21.

⁴⁹ Comm. Eph. 1:5.

Logos, but not part of the historic mission of Christ. Calvin allows to the Son a share in the electing activity of the Father, yet this seems to be in no way connected to His incarnate work. However, we have already noticed how reticent he is on Christ as the author of our election.

How far did Calvin regard the work of Christ as universal in its scope?⁵⁰ There is little in Calvin to suggest that he held the doctrine of "limited atonement" which mainly arose through the logical perversion of his successors. He states uncompromisingly that Christ came to bring the whole world under the authority of God and to obedience to Him.⁵¹ Jesus Christ came not to reconcile a few individuals to God, but to extend His grace over the whole world.⁵² Calvin's exegesis of passages such as Mt. 20.28 and Mk. 14.24 also bears on this point; he holds that the "many" in these passages is to be interpreted as in Rom. 5:15 to cover the whole human race.⁵³ In a sermon he exhorts his hearers not to allow souls to perish "who have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ".⁵⁴ Perhaps the most important passage for assessing Calvin's attitude to this question is his comment on I Jn. 2:3. Though he will not allow too general a meaning to be placed on the text, as it was written primarily for the comfort of believers, yet he says that he accepts the distinction of the Schoolmen that Christ died sufficiently for the sins of the whole world, but efficiently only for the sins of the elect.⁵⁵ The reason all do not receive the benefits of the death of Christ is that unbelief prevents them⁵⁶; but we must also recollect that Calvin frequently insists that faith is purely a gift of God. It is in

⁵⁰ I am grateful for much of this discussion to S. H. Russell, Op. Cit., Pg. 246.

⁵¹ Comm. Isa. 42.1.

⁵² Serm. I Tim. 2.5ff.

⁵³ Comm. Matt. 20.26.

⁵⁴ Serm. 2 Tim. 2.19.

⁵⁵ Comm. I Jn. 2.2.

⁵⁶ Comm. Heb. 9.27.

the light of Calvin's distinction between sufficient and efficient atonement that we must interpret such a passage as his comment on Col. 1.20, where he declares that the benefits of redemption are offered to wicked men, although Christ is in fact not their "peace-maker", a passage which on occasion is quoted to support the view that he held a doctrine of limited atonement.⁵⁷

The Proclamation of the Gospel:

Corresponding to the universal nature of the work of Christ is Calvin's injunction that the Gospel is to be proclaimed to all men; we are reconciled to God that we should endeavour to make our brothers sharers of the same benefit.⁵⁸ We must include all men in our prayers because we do not know who the elect are⁵⁹; even our deadly enemies may one day repent.⁶⁰ It is especially our duty in practice to regard all those called into the Church as belonging to the elect.⁶¹ We should love all mankind, starting with the household of faith.⁶²

The reason for the general offer of salvation is twofold: first, it is to encourage believers, informing them that all may come; secondly, it is to render unbelievers completely without excuse.⁶³ Here again we find the distinction between the internal and external call, leading Calvin to say that God offers His Word indiscriminately to good and bad, but works with His Spirit only in the elect.⁶⁴

Criticism of Calvin's Position:

In all this discussion of election related to Christ, which we believe is Calvin's most vulnerable point, obvious

⁵⁷ Comm. Col. 1.20.

⁵⁸ Comm. Ps. 32.8.

⁵⁹ Comm. Jer. 15.1.

⁶⁰ Comm. Ps. 109.6.

⁶¹ Comm. I Cor. 1.9.

⁶² Comm. Col. 1.4.

⁶³ Inst. 3.24.17.

⁶⁴ Comm. Eze. 2.3.

uneasiness is in his mind. Two definite strands run through his teaching. On the one hand, there is indeed eloquent testimony to the place that Christ has in the election of men. With moving words Calvin enjoins the believer to know his election and to enjoy all certainty and security by turning to Christ, Himself the first and most evidently elect man. On the other hand, because of his overwhelming sense of the will of the sovereign God, he starts from God's "eternal decree" before the foundation of the world, and thereafter links the decree to the historic work of Christ for its fulfilment. This is only too obvious in his article which reads

"...nevertheless no other cause of the discrimination is to be sought in God other than His mere will, which is the supreme rule of righteousness".

Thus we have an inescapable inlet for uncertainty and fear in election. Christ is clearly God's instrument in our election, but the cause of our election is the divine eternal will. To find the primary ground of our election we should penetrate the deep counsels of God, into which Christ has not been admitted. For Christ is the "manner in which God discharges His work of grace"; but the reason why God takes the elect by the hand "has another superior cause, that eternal purpose by which He destined them to life".⁶⁵ From this we must seriously doubt whether Calvin really allowed full significance and scope to the reality of our election in Christ. Further, this is the fundamental reason why he must relate the elect and reprobate identically to the will of God, however much he attempts to avoid this conclusion.

A further difficulty emerges in Calvin's conception of faith. The desire to remove all traces of synergism and to protect the truth of "sole gratia" led Calvin to understand man as a mere object of grace. This transformed the biblical

⁶⁵ De. aet. Dei. praed. VIII.4.

"personal relationship" between God and man into a causal relation: God the cause, faith the effect. Calvin has in fact (to express it in modern terms) destroyed the "I-Thou" relation, and substituted an "I-it" relation. What he attempted to express was that of himself man is incapable of doing the will of God and of believing in Christ, and thus that faith and freedom are wholly the gift of God, which accords with biblical teaching. But he appears to forget that sinful man is a subject, not an object, and that grace is a personal act and not the cause of an effect. In his situation before God man always remains "person" and the transaction, which takes place within the sphere of responsibility, remains personal. Therefore it should never be transferred into the dimension of "cause - effect".

This mistaken view of faith also effected his understanding of election. The New Testament always correlates faith and election, so that the two are never to be understood apart from each other. But in Calvin's view there may obviously be a clean severance between faith and election: election then becomes "determinism" in the distant past, and faith the irresistible result of this prior determination.

Appreciation of Calvin's Emphases:

Before concluding our study of Calvin's doctrine of election, however, it is imperative to understand why Calvin so jealously defended and preached this doctrine.

The doctrine of election may be taken as a precise pointing of Calvin's dominating insistence on God's priority in all of life. As one scholar has clearly pointed out:

"Calvin's doctrine of election was not so much a gloomy and pessimistic denial of human freedom as the joyous proclamation that man lived in an ordered universe where the sovereignty of God removed from the region of doubt the salvation of the true believer. It is an attempt to recognise necessity and order in the world"

of God's creation - to see temporal things in Spinoza's immortal phrase 'sub specie eternitatis' "66

Predominant in his thought was the desire to preserve the principle of "sole gratia", to him (and to the New Testament) the foundation of the Gospel.⁶⁷ All is of grace: without it we would not live nor possess eternal life, the life which comes through the gift of faith. A wave of horror ran through him at the thought that man could in any way merit salvation. This is illustrated in the constant reminder that even faith is the gift of God and does not arise from man. Every step of redemption had to be from God to be certain of fulfilment - from before the beginning of time to the final glorification of the elect.

Again, his thought must be set within the context of his times, where the dominant stress in the Roman Church was emphatically on man attaining to salvation through the sacramental system devised by the Church. For Calvin this emphasis on the strivings of man, albeit with the aid of God's grace, obscured the nature of the New Testament teaching on grace as well as the "objectivity" of our salvation which he saw correctly to be rooted in election.

Further, it is our belief that Calvin attempted to do justice to and take seriously the doctrine of man delineated in Scripture. "Total depravity" was an honest attempt to acknowledge that the depravity which sin has produced in human nature extends to the whole of it, and permeates human life and experience in all its ranges; that there is no part of man's nature, not even his virtue, which is unaffected by it, Calvin attempted to view human nature, not from the ethical but from the strictly theocentric standpoint - man as sinner before God. In this state man's only hope was to trust in the election of

⁶⁶ J. Dall, in an article on Presbyterianism, in the Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, Vol. 10, Pg. 244.

⁶⁷ Inst. 3.22.3.

God and to accept it as a sovereign and free movement of God for his salvation. As Berkouwer reminds us, "the doctrine of election is a constant reminder that all human glory, all self-conceit is impossible".⁶⁸

Then a further reason for preserving this doctrine so carefully was that it presented a basis for the assurance of salvation, in fact the only basis possible. Nothing in life or death could possibly destroy the believer's confidence, for salvation lay solely in the work of God. Even the concept of the "invisible Church" was used to guarantee for the elect, in a way impossible for a corrupt and divided Church, their salvation and unity of faith.

Finally, we must note the personal character of John Calvin. Here was a man gripped by the overwhelming sense of God, for whom election was the highest expression of the grace of God. As Warfield has said of him,

"as he contemplated the majesty of this Sovereign Father, his whole being bowed in reverence before Him, and his whole heart burned with zeal for His glory".⁶⁹

⁶⁸ G.C. Berkouwer, Op. cit., Pg. 51.

⁶⁹ B.B. Warfield, Calvin as a theologian and Calvinism today,
Pg. 4.

CHAPTER SEVEN

ELECTION IN THE REFORMED CONFESSIONS OF FAITH. **

In this chapter it is sufficient for our purpose to examine some of the more important confessions and observe the prominence given predestination in them. Then we require to consider shortly whether the confessions adequately represent the Scriptures. We must put them to the test of the Scriptural message as we understand it in the light of modern biblical scholarship, seeking through such criticism new obedience to the Truth, and continuing, as Calvin put it, "to be disciples of Christ right to the end" (Geneva Catechism, 1541, Q.308). Further, as Prof. Torrance has reminded us,

"we keep faith with our fathers and show our thankfulness for the instruction which they have handed on to us, if we learn from their time-conditioned habits and modes of thought (which no generation can escape) how to distinguish more clearly between the heavenly treasure and the earthen vessel, and learn how to take out of that treasure things new as well as old".¹

The Danger of Systematization:

It appears in the history of the Church that any doctrine detached from practical life and made an object of exclusively theoretical discussion loses much vitality and relevance in the life of the Church.² A doctrine extracted from Scripture and placed in a rigid dogmatic framework quickly becomes "dated" and loses its dynamic for preaching and pastoral care. This is an abiding danger of "orthodoxy".

** In this chapter I am indebted to Prof. B.B. Warfield for his article, Predestination in the Reformed Confessions, in his Studies in Theology, where he has given us an extensive treatment of the doctrine in the Reformed confessions and standards. The tenor of the article, however, makes it apparent that he is conditioned by his "Calvinism" when evaluating the place predestination holds in the various confessions.

¹ T.F. Torrance, The School of Faith, Pg. xii.

² An outstanding example of this is the difference between Calvin's sermons where election throbs with meaning for the life of the believer and his articles where election has lost vitality through being systematized.

It does not mean, however, that we should despise the need for a confessional standard or a systematic understanding of God's dealings with sinful men, but it warns us that the word of God is never at the arbitrary disposal of man.³ Particularly concerning election we are directed to the fact that a doctrine "lives" only in the context of faith, where faith is the response to God calling men in grace, "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you".⁴ As Brunner has asserted,

"...the doctrine of election is therefore intelligible.... only in the decision of faith, not as a doctrine 'about', but only as an address to the 'Thou' ".⁵

We have already noted that Calvin clung *fiercely* to election because of the religious assurance it provided. After Calvin, however, Protestant scholasticism sought to mould the doctrine of election into a rigid and dogmatic pattern. Increasing attention was paid to the "decrees" of God and their sequence, so that a struggle developed between the "supra- and infra-lapsarians" and reached its peak in the 17th century. This was not merely a matter of scholastic hairsplitting; Barth in his discussion of election has considered this old struggle very thoroughly and has appreciated its deepest motives⁶ simultaneously presenting a "purified" supralapsarianism as the basis of his own doctrinal structure.⁷ Yet it is clear that we face here a subtle controversy which owes its existence to the trespassing of the boundaries set by revelation.⁸

At a later stage we shall have to consider whether the confessions adopt the supralapsarian or infralapsarian position; but first we must briefly outline the two schemes.

³ cf. K. Barth, Church Dogmatics, Vol.1., Pt. 1, Pg. 159.

⁴ John 15:16a.

⁵ E. Brunner, The Christian Doctrine of God, Vol. 1, Pg. 338.

⁶ K. Barth, Church Dogmatics, Vol. 2, Pt. 2, Pgs. 127-145.

⁷ A.D. Polman, Barth, pg. 35.

⁸ G.C. Berkouwer, Divine Election, Pg. 254.

An Outline of Supra- and Infra-lapsarianism:

In the supra position the first decree is that of predestination, which is thought to precede the decree of creation and Fall. The later decrees of God (creation and Fall) are then subsumed under the first decree of God. They form the means whereby the primary decree becomes realised. The decree to election and rejection thus precedes all other decrees. In this decree man does not yet appear as fallen man, so that God's primary dealings with man do not take his sin into account. Hence, rejection is in the eternal counsel of God, more an act of His sheer sovereignty than of His justice. God's primary plan, His first a priori decree - also as decree to reprobation - is a decree of His eternal pleasure.

According to the infra standpoint the decree to creation and Fall logically precedes the decree to rejection and election, so that in the counsel of God rejection presupposes a fallen mankind. This rejection then changes its nature and is more an act of His justice than of His sovereignty. This does not imply that the infra position denies the sovereignty of God, but in it the idea of God's wrath and justice is central.

A criticism of these two positions is not integral to our immediate discussion but we should consider the following remarks. Van der Zanden says that

"we cannot speak of 'before' or 'after' in God's eternal decrees as we do in time, hence the difference between supra and infra can be called imaginary because it implies the application of a temporal order to eternity",⁹

while Berkouwer himself maintains that "the concept of succession in the doctrine of predestination is a clear form of the humanization of God".¹⁰

⁹ Quoted in G.C. Berkouwer, Op. Cit., Pg. 266.

¹⁰ Ibid., Pg. 267.

An Examination of Selected Confessions:

For our discussion we shall confine ourselves to an examination of the doctrine as it is found in the following statements of belief compiled during the Reformation period and the early 17th century:

- a. Confessio Gallicana (1559)
- b. Confessio Belgica (1566)
- c. Confessio Scoticana (1560)
- d. The 59 Articles (1562)
- e. The Second Helvetic Confession (1562/6)
- f. The Heidelberg Catechism (1563),
- g. The Synod of Dort (1618/9)
- h. The Westminster Confession (1646).

The commanding influence of Calvin penetrated to every corner of the Reformed Churches and is traceable in all the credal statements framed during the 16th and 17th centuries. Warfield believes that the consistent way in which predestination was treated in subsequent Calvinian formularies and confessions is directly traceable to the influence of the Genevensis Consensus, where Calvin in his reply to Bolsec dealt thoroughly with this doctrine, fortifying it fully with expositions of Scripture. Yet what he proclaimed was common to all the Reformers: in fact, it was Luther, Melancthon, Bucer and Peter Martyr who first put the doctrine of predestination forward as the determining element in the Reformers' teaching.

a. Conf. Gallicana (1559)

The third of the French Confessions drafted by Calvin after enlargement at the Synod of Paris, 1559, became the national confession of the French Reformed Churches. In the confession Providence is asserted in the VIIIth article and predestination not till the XIth article.

The confession ascribes to God's will "all that comes to pass in the world", but denies that He is the author of sin although He uses the evil of devils and sinners by turning it to

good. Election is seen as "the eternal and immutable" choice of God, not based upon foresight of human works, and by which He has determined to withdraw His chosen ones from the universal corruption and condemnation in which all men are plunged "leaving", it is significantly added, "the rest in this same corruption and condemnation, to manifest in them His justice, as in the former He makes the riches of His mercy to shine forth".

Thus a clear distinction is made between elect and reprobate (while the decision concerning the elect is said to have been "determined in Christ Jesus before the creation of the world"). The moral inability of men is stressed by such phrases as "universal corruption" and "by nature we cannot have a single good motion". Calvin's insistence that both acts glorify God is seen in the purpose of election to reveal God's mercy and of preterition to manifest God's justice.

b. Conf. Belgica (1566).

Of similar character to the Gallican confession is the Belgic confession, composed by Guido de Brès, later martyred.

The statement on general providence (Art.13) merely repeats the ideas of the Gallican confession in an enriched form. The article on election, on the other hand, is brisker than that in the Gallican confession but its teaching is the same. The whole human race is seen as sunk in ruin through Adam's transgression. God displays His mercy in saving those who "in His eternal and immutable counsel He has elected and chosen in Jesus Christ our Lord", while He shows His righteousness in leaving the rest in their ruin.

c. Conf. Scoticana (1560)

This confession was drawn up by Knox and his fellow ministers and adopted by Parliament in 1560, becoming the legal confession of the Church of Scotland.

Here Christology and predestination were regarded as in

some way parallel¹¹ and for that reason were treated together in articles VII and VIII. Article VIII, of Election, begins indeed with election in Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world was laid, but proceeds unhesitatingly to link this purpose of God with the Incarnation, and insists that for sinners the Son of God took Himself a body of our body, flesh of our flesh and bone of our bones. "For this cause, are we not afraid to call God our Father, not so much because He created us as for that He has given us His only Son".

Again, it is declared that our salvation is traceable back to "the eternal and immutable decree of God", and that faith is wrought in the hearts of the elect by the Holy Spirit, who is also the instigator of good works.¹² The invisible and true Church consists of God's elect of all ages: while in the visible Church "the reprobate may be joined in the society of the elect and may externally use with them the benefits of the Word and Sacraments".

d. The Thirty Nine Articles.¹³

Reformed influences were also working towards establishing the Church of England on a sound Protestant basis. The Articles were prepared by a commission under Cranmer, who was their chief author. But the influence of Peter Martyr is distinctly noticeable in the 17th article, On Predestination and Election.

It confines itself to the statement of the gracious idea of predestination (that is, "predestination to life") and consists of two parts. In the first, "predestination to life" is expounded and defined, while in the second half its use is expounded.

¹¹ cf. K. Barth's treatment of these articles in The Knowledge of God and the Service of God, Pg. 68-79, where he appreciates the link between predestination and Christology.

¹² Articles 3,13,16,17,25.

¹³ A "modern" interpretation of this article is given by E.J. Bicknell, The Thirty Nine Articles, Pg. 220-227.

In this article Predestination to life is made to rest on election, for here these terms have different meanings. Election is viewed as the choice of God "before the foundations of the world" while predestination is seen as "the everlasting purpose" to implement this choice in time. The "unchangeable decree", secret to us, consists of two parts: negatively, to deliver from curse and damnation those whom He has chosen "in Christ" and, positively, "to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation, as vessels made to honour". In this latter movement is included calling, justification, adoption, good works, and final perseverance.

A warning is levelled against those carnal and curious who abuse the doctrine; it will lead them to "desperation or to wretchedness of most unclean living". The whole closes with an exhortation quite in Calvin's manner to make the revealed will of God as declared in Scripture our guide to life. This article is soundly representative of the Reformers' teaching and expresses clearly the positive biblical emphasis of "predestination to life". It shares with other confessions the basic ideas of "the secret counsel of God", mankind as under "curse and damnation" and the elect as "vessels of honour".

e. The Second Helvetic Confession (1562/66):

A somewhat chary tone in respect of predestination clings to this confession composed by Bullinger in 1562 for his own private use and rapidly adopted throughout the Reformed world in 1566 on its publication.

Article X. Numerous quotations from the New Testament for each aspect of predestination are given, and the positive side is expounded and developed (that is, predestination to life). A pleasing feature of this statement is that predestination is closely linked to Christ so that the words "in Christ" constantly appear. There is an obvious attempt to avoid speculation, while the tone is more "existential" than the other confessions.

Especially is this noticeable when we are exhorted not to dwell upon whether there will be few or many saved, but are told to "strive to enter in at the strait gate".

The confession condemns those who

"seek outside of Christ whether they are elect and what God has decreed concerning them from all eternity".

Further, we may be certain of our salvation if we believe in Christ and are in Christ, bearing fruit in a holy life. We are told that the Father "has laid bare to us in Christ the eternal sentence of His predestination" and that Christ is to be "the mirror in which we contemplate our predestination". This is a strong Calvinian emphasis, since the thought of Christ as mirror is obviously taken directly from the Institutes. As Warfield has remarked, this confession gives the impression that the doctrine is contemplated from the standpoint of history rather than eternity.

f. The Heidelberg Catechism (1563).

The catechism has little to say about this high mystery. Under the doctrine of Providence, general predestination is alluded to clearly: the eternal Father is said to uphold and govern the universe "by His eternal counsel and providence" and that effectively for His ends "so governing all creatures thatall things come not by chance but by His Fatherly hand" (Q.26,27).

Special predestination is alluded to under the doctrine of the Church "that out of the whole human race, the Son of God, by His Spirit and Word, gathers, protects and preserves for Himself unto eternal life an elected communion" and each of us is to believe that he is and "ever shall be a living member of the same" (Q.54)

Question 54 is important for its concern with the Church, "the elect communion", as the object of election. The individual is seen as elect within the context of an elect community. This aspect of election has been neglected in many confessions

where election is viewed as exclusively individualistic.¹⁴

g. The Synod of Dort (1618/9):¹⁵

The rise of the Arminian party known as the Remonstrants offered the most serious assault yet suffered by Reformed theology. Predestination was made conditional on faith, and irresistible grace denied. This was met by the Dutch Calvinists in a counter-movement with the Canons of Dort, published authoritatively in 1619 as the finding of the national synod to which representatives of nearly all the Reformed churches were invited.¹⁶ According to Seeberg "It was a council which has no parallel in the history of Protestantism"¹⁷

The form of the Canons was largely determined by the fact that they were an official reply to the Remonstrants. The first head of doctrine deals directly with predestination, the rest with the connected points of particular redemption, inability, irresistible grace, and perseverance. The matter under each separate head is disposed in two parts: first, the doctrine is positively set forth and, secondly, the corresponding errors vexing the churches are named and refuted. The head of predestination contains eighteen paragraphs in its positive portion, beginning with a broad statement of the doctrine of original sin and man's universal guilt and ending with an ascription of praise and adoration in the light of "these mysteries".

The reason for some receiving the gift of faith from God and others not receiving it proceeds from God's "eternal decree". Election is "the unchangeable purpose of God" whereby "before

¹⁴ Barth has justly reproached the traditional doctrine of predestination for often paying exclusive attention to the election of individuals thereby neglecting the election of the body of Christians.

¹⁵ See B. Warburton, Calvinism, Pgs. 47-62, for a short history and background of the synod.

¹⁶ Delegates were present from the Palatinate, Hesse, Nassau, East Friesland, Bremen, Emden, England, Scotland, Geneva, and German Switzerland.

¹⁷ R. Seeberg, The History of Doctrines, Pg. 422. He would probably have had to revise this remark in the light of the ecumenical councils of this century.

the foundation of the world" He chose a certain number of persons to redemption in Christ. (CD 1:7) The object of election is fallen man and its end is redemption, with all the means of grace adjoined ("both to grace and to glory", 1:8). The unity of the decree of election and the means of salvation is clearly asserted. The canons carefully explain that election is the cause and not the effect of all good motives, for "election is the fountain of every saving good".

The source of this gracious election is traced back to "the good pleasure of God" (1:10). Its unchangeableness is emphasised, so that "neither can the elect be caste away, nor their number diminished" (1:11). Finally, its use is to attain to assurance, to incite to good works, and to comfort the people of God. (1:12-14).

Further, the "decree of reprobation" is dealt with as "peculiarly tending to illustrate and recommend to us the eternal and unmerited grace of election" and as "a declaration of His justice" to punish the reprobate for "their unbelief and all other sins" (1:15). Wavering believers are urged to beware of ill-founded despair in the light of the doctrine of reprobation because this is meant merely for those who have given themselves up to "the cares of the world". The whole section is concluded with an article on the destiny of children dying in infancy where "in virtue of the covenant of grace, godly parents have no reason to doubt of the election of their children" (1:17) and on the proper attitude of mind in the face of these holy mysteries (1:18).

Little of importance is added to this positive statement in the sections on Rejection of Errors. These take up consecutively the Remonstrants statements and reject them by citing appropriate Scripture. This strengthens and sharpens the positive propositions already asserted: particularly those concerning the immutability of God's electing counsel, its

entire independence of foreseen faith or works, and its complete sovereignty over salvation.

We can agree with Warfield when he says that

"the whole constitutes one of the most prudent and satisfactory expositions of the Reformed doctrine of predestination ever given wide confessional authority".

Seeberg, however, points out significantly that the decrees of Dort (as also the Westminster confession) indicate a displacement of the original order in soteriology. Predestination was once a support for the assurance of salvation; but here it has itself been made the fundamental conception. The course was once from justification to predestination; now it is reversed. This is an inversion of Calvin's order in the Institutes, where "Justification by faith" is treated before "Election".

Finally, reference must be made to the Christological context of election. Citing Eph. 1:4, the canons speak of the election in Christ "whom God from eternity appointed the Mediator and Head of the elect and the foundation of salvation"(1:7). Clearly this attempts to avoid an abstract decree of election, as our eyes are directed simultaneously to the election of God and to the Mediator, while elsewhere there is mention of "the gracious election"(1:10), the "eternal and unmerited grace of election" (1:15) and "the grace of unmerited election". Nevertheless, by thinking of eternity as an endless extension of time, the fear of an abstract decree "before the foundation of the world" cannot be avoided even by providing a Christological setting for the doctrine.

h. The Westminster Confession (1646).¹⁸

The Westminster Confession and Catechisms were drawn up by a large national assembly of Anglican divines and laymen (plus a few Scottish assessors) convened in Westminster,

¹⁸ Refer A.A. Hodge, The Confession of Faith.
G.S.Hendry, The Westminster Confession for Today.

England, by the Long Parliament, from July 1, 1643, to February 22, 1648. Men who represented all views on ecclesiastical polity were present - Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Independents, and Erastians. The Confession was adopted by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1649, and is recognised as the principal "subordinate standard" at the present day.¹⁹

The Confession is excessively legalistic, more constitutional than confessional in character. This is reflected in its style with its precise phrasing, its cumbrous repetitions, and the multiplication of prepositions and qualifying clauses. It is obvious as Riddell maintains,

"the whole Confession is logically built up on the premises of the third chapter. The divine decrees, ordained before the first day of creation, are fulfilled in the consummation at the last day and are effective to all eternity".²⁰

In Creation God reveals the glory of His eternal power. In His Providence He hardens some and softens others. Effectual calling is for all those whom God has predestined to life, and only those, including elect infants and other elect persons who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word. Justification, sanctification, and the perseverance of the saints depend upon the immutable decrees. The Church invisible consists of the whole number of the elect. In Baptism grace is exhibited and conferred only to those whom God has chosen. The eschatological teaching is equally bound up with the doctrine of predestination, the salvation of the elect and the damnation of the reprobate.

Again, Seeberg's criticism is relevant here that the Westminster Confession has inverted Calvin's order in the Institutes by treating predestination immediately after God and the Holy Trinity. Here the certainty and assurance of

¹⁹ It was not so recognised between 1660-1690.

²⁰ J.G. Riddell, God's Eternal Decrees, Pg. 352 in S.J.T. Vol. 2, 1949.

salvation is definitely threatened by this order, for the article Of God's Eternal Election is placed before the article On Creation thus indicating that the destinies of men are firmly settled before Creation. Even the words "chosen in Christ" in Section V of the article cannot eradicate the fear that salvation is effected ultimately by a secret and unknowable determinism.

Ideas similar to those found in the previous confessions are expressed here. God "from all eternity" ordained whatever happens: yet three propositions are maintained along with this confession. First, God is not the author of sin and secondly, no violence is offered to the will of the creature. Together with these propositions is the fact that the contingency of second causes is not taken away.

If the statement, "They who are elected, being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ" naturally suggests sympathy with the Infralapsarian doctrine, it does not rule out Supralapsarianism.²¹ It appears that the Assembly deliberately adopted this ambiguous position so that neither shade of opinion would be offended by the confession.

"Predestination to life" and "fore-ordination to death" is "for the manifestation of His glory". The number of those predestined and foreordained is so certain that it cannot be increased or diminished - it appears that even God could not alter the number if He desired!

Concerning reprobation, God passed by the rest of mankind and ordained them "to dishonour and wrath for their sin". The purpose of this is "for the glory of His sovereign power" and "to the praise of His glorious justice". The final section cautions men to handle "this high mystery" with care, ending with a typical Calvinian exhortation to attend to the will

²¹ J. Macpherson, The Confession of Faith, Pg. 23.

of God revealed in His Word so that from the "certainty of their effectual vocation" men might be "assured of their eternal salvation".

The Basic Agreements between the Confessions:

Before attempting a criticism of these confessions it is essential to note their basic agreements.

(a) Absolute Predestination is a common Presupposition.

Firstly, the fact of an absolute predestination is the common presupposition of the whole body of the Reformed confessions.²² Of the statement of faith we have examined only the Heidelberg catechism refers to the doctrine incidentally, no separate paragraph being given to its formal development. This is probably because its practical end was primary in its composition, leading to a subjective rather than formal emphasis. The confessions take especial care to guard against the supposition that God, by virtue of His universal decree, is chargeable with the authorship of or moral responsibility for sin: but alongside of this the strongest stress is laid upon every event in the believer's life as being foreordained of God. Logically, these two statements conflict, as we noted when treating Calvin's dilemma, but the confessions appear to have held them in tension without attempting any reconciliation.

(b) The Nature of Predestination.

Secondly, the Confessions remarkably agree in their statement of the nature of predestination. No other cause can be cited for the predestination of men to eternal life than the good pleasure of God; all thoughts of merit are therefore destroyed. The standards are at one in proclaiming the particularity of election, except for the Second Helvetic Confession where there is a contradiction. The article on election

²² A detailed treatment of all Reformed creeds and confessions on absolute predestination is given in Warfield's article, Pg. 219.

mentions the fewness of the number, but in article XIII, of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we have the words, "...for God has from eternity predestinated to save the world through Christ...." thus revealing unwillingness to limit the extent of election. There is nevertheless strong agreement that election deals not with a variable group but with specific individuals, the number and names whom God knows. Election is therefore seen as an act of discrimination. To all alike the elect are a body of individuals who, by an act of free and independent choice deriving from the love of God, are separated from others thus passed by and left unchosen and unblessed by the series of acts of divine grace which follow in history upon election (that is, effectual calling, justification, adoption and sanctification).

A clear and consistent stress is made upon election as an act of God. Election and reprobation are never placed parallel to each other as a twofoldness of the one divine causality²³, as some have understood. When Warfield speaks of the "soteriological interest in which the confessions were composed"²⁴ he adds that "the doctrine of sovereign preterition" is not always explicitly defined; and he also speaks of a sometimes "merely incidental treatment" evident in some confessions compiled by Zwingli and Calvin. According to Warfield this striking fact may not be interpreted as an unwillingness to accept, and therefore as a refusal to discuss the doctrine of preterition. He gives a different explanation: "It may rather be supposed to be omitted just because it is so fully presupposed".

But this explanation is unsatisfactory, for here we approach the essential structure of the doctrine of election. From the deterministic point of view one would have to speak simultaneously of election and rejection. Necessarily a deter-

²³ G.C. Berkouwer, Op. Cit., Pg. 194.

²⁴ B.B. Warfield, Op. Cit., Pg. 223.

ministic viewpoint would not permit a variation, could not speak of "election" being primary and would have to posit a thoroughgoing parallelism. But in the light of Scripture, the "disturbed" balance in the confessions is not only understandable, but completely legitimate. As Brunner has reminded us, "The Scripture teaches a divine predestination of election; it also teaches the judgement of the unbelieving but it never teaches a divine predestination of rejection".²⁵ For the confessions did not mean to give an explanation of how everything, in the same causal manner, is derived from God. Thus Berkouwer asserts, "when they spoke of the light of election, they spoke also of a shadow, but never with any trace of parallelism".²⁶

It is therefore incorrect to say with Warfield that its composers lived "in such confidence in the implication of preterition in the very idea of election, as seemed to render its separate statement unnecessary".²⁷ The unsatisfactory aspect of this explanation becomes clear when we consider that elsewhere Warfield himself says that the Biblical writers did not make the doctrine of preterition a part of their explicit teaching.²⁸ It seems better to say that when these men spoke of election and non-election, they wanted primarily to speak with Scripture of election as an act of God in Jesus Christ.

Warfield offers a second explanation, namely, that the complete or partial "omission" was connected with the practical aspects of the doctrine of election. The confessions passed "lightly over all that is not immediately utilizable by the simplest Christian consciousness". But this does not satisfy

²⁵ E. Brunner, Our Faith, Pg. 36.

²⁶ G.C. Berkouwer, Op.cit., Pg. 195.
cf. K. Barth, Op.cit., Pg. 13.

²⁷ Warfield, Op.cit., Pg. 224.

²⁸ B.B. Warfield, in the article Predestination in Biblical Doctrines, Pg. 64 (1929).

either, since it suggests that there are aspects of the doctrine of election which cannot be made useful for common believers.

We may not, however, overlook the fact that reprobation is explicitly taught in some of the confessions. Especially is this true of the important seventeenth century statements such as the Westminster Confession and the Canons of Dort where the decree of reprobation includes two elements,

- a. to pass by some in the bestowal of regenerating and saving grace, and
- b. to assign them to dishonour and to the wrath of God for their sins.

We have already mentioned the legalism of the 17th century confessions, derived from a Protestant scholasticism characteristic of a later generation, together with a tendency to view salvation in terms of black and white. Here we have an outstanding example of this method.²⁹ Then we must observe two further similarities.

(c) Predestination of the Means to Salvation:

The confessions are unanimous in recognising that election to salvation involves a predestination of all the means to that final end, thereby doing full justice to Romans 8:30. Warfield states that corresponding to this is the act of preterition which involves the foreordination of the means to final reprobation. This statement is the product of a mind similar to those who composed the 17th century statements and cannot be honestly maintained of the earlier confessions, especially as we have already noted their reticence in treating this topic.

²⁹ It is interesting to observe that there is no explicit mention of reprobation in the following confessions, many which derive directly from Calvin or his influence: Zwingli's Exposition of the Christian Faith (1531); the First Basle Confession (1534); the Genevan Catechism (1541); Calvin's creeds composed for the Genevan students (1559); the English articles (1553), the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), and the Second Bohemian Confession (1575). In Zwingli's "Fidei ratio" (1530), the Scots Confession (1560), and the Second Helvetic Confession (1562) it is alluded to but receives no direct treatment. The Belgic Confession (1566) merely mentions preterition.

(d) The Object of Predestination:

Now considering the attitude of the confessions to the object of predestination, we shall have to discuss the Infra- and Supralapsarian position in them.

Of the three great parties which grew up among the Reformed divided by what they considered to be the object of predestination - the Supralapsarian, Infralapsarian, and Salmurian, conceiving the object of predestination respectively as unfallen, fallen, and redeemed man - the first and third receive no support obvious from the confessions.

Bavinck has pointed out that the supralapsarian presentation "has not been incorporated in a single Reformed confession" but that the infra position has received an official place.³⁰ It is not difficult to understand what he means when we remember that in them predestination is continually focused on the fallen human race. We read, for instance, in the Confessio Gallicana of God's goodness and mercy "by which He elects and saves from corruption and damnation", and in Article 16 of the Belgic Confession that God preserves from perdition all whom He in His eternal and unchangeable counsel out of His sheer goodness has elected. In itself, however, this does not yet imply a decisively infralapsarian presentation, because there is usually no mention at all of any succession in the decrees of God, but election is rather presented in relation to the perdition from which God saves.³¹

Yet it is interesting to note that Bavinck later goes on to criticise both positions by charging them with one-sidedness because they both appeal to groups of texts. The infra to those related to a fallen world and the supra to those which deal with God's sovereignty in redemption. On the other hand

³⁰ H. Bavinck, The Doctrine of God. For a full discussion of the supra- and infra-lapsarian conflict see Pgs. 382-407.

³¹ G.C. Berkouwer, Op.cit., Pg. 261.

nothing is affirmed in the confessions, according to Warfield, which is inconsistent with Supralapsarianism. They could be interpreted in this vein as well.

Again, we should bear in mind that this controversy arose in the seventeenth century, and probably was not present in the formulating of the earlier statements of faith which attempted to preserve the sovereignty of God's grace in the work of redemption by presenting the doctrine of election as scripturally as possible. This is in sharp distinction to the later presentations which appear to have been dominated by the desire for a tight system rather than to present the many-sidedness of Scripture on this point.

Possibly the most expressive affirmation of the true position is given by Dr. P. Shaff when he says that "all the Reformed confessions.....keep within the limits of infralapsarianism".³²

Election in the Confessions Compared with the Biblical Approach to Election.

We have now to consider whether the confessions adequately represent the scriptural teaching on election, and whether it is still acceptable in the form in which it is presented in the confessions.³³

(a) The Difference in Tone between the Confessions and Scripture.

A general comparison of the biblical passages which dwell on God's electing love with the statements of the doctrine in the confessions indicate a profound difference in tone between them. If we consider two important passages where most of the terms used in the formulation of the doctrine appear, Ephesians 1:3-14 and Romans 8.29-30, we are struck by the overwhelming sense of joy, triumph and praise which resounds through them.

³² As quoted by Warfield, Op.cit., Pg. 230.

³³ I am grateful to G.S.Hendry, The Westminster Confession for Today, Pg. 51f. for a number of valuable insights.

The presentations in a number of confessions, by contrast, breathe an air of the dread and doom of a fixed determinism and invariably end with advice to handle the subject with extreme caution. In fact, in Ephesians 1 and Romans 8 there is little suggestion of caution; rather the Apostle exults in the triumph of grace in redemption. As Prof. Berkouwer has aptly stated:

"Election functions nowhere as a background to the order of salvation, a background that creates uncertainty, or as a shadow of the 'deus absconditus' over the revelation of the 'deus revelatus'. On the contrary, we hear with it a hymn of praise and gratitude for the foundation of salvation".³⁴

Election does not appear to us here as an unbearable tension or as a mysterious problem. It completely lacks those aspects and we meet election in emphatically doxological and soteriological contexts, as when Paul writes that God "chose us in Christ..... foreordained us unto adoption as sons....according to the good pleasure of His will" (Eph. 1:4,5). There is nothing mysteriously problematic here: "to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved"(Eph. 1:6). In Romans 8 our attention is drawn to the interrelations in the numerous saving acts of God, and to the consolation which lies anchored in Christ for time and eternity. Salvation history is here seen as having its roots in eternity, and the plan of God as a basis to salvation not as a threat. Election here is the source of that certainty which causes Paul to break into the confident song of triumph that nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8.35ff.).

(b) The Place given to Reprobation.

The confessions tend to harden over the years, so that by the 17th century we have the Westminster Confession, the Canons of Dort, and the Formula Consensus Helvetica (1675) built on strictly logical structures so that reprobation occupies a more integral position than previously. In this they differ from

³⁴ G.C. Berkouwer, Op.cit., Pg. 13.

Calvin who flatly refused to subject the dogmas of the Christian religion to a particular scheme and who always began with the data which Scripture offered upon the subject in hand. The later confessions, however, build up a logical structure which could not be tampered with on one point without causing the whole edifice damage (cf. the "Five points" of Dort). In most of the later confessions therefore reprobation follows logically from what precedes, so that it is seen and accepted as a fact although an attempt is rarely made to substantiate it by Scripture.

The Westminster confession has followed Calvin in the Genevensis Consensus in leaning heavily on Romans 9 where "vessels of wrath fitted to destruction" are mentioned.³⁵ Calvin in his commentary on Romans spoke without any hesitation of the reprobates as vessels of wrath made for destruction, as they were already thus predestined before their birth.³⁶ But Paul's words cannot legitimately bear this interpretation: for apart from the fact that the passage does not say that the vessels of wrath were "prepared beforehand" or by whom they were fitted to destruction (as was noted by the Westminster Assembly), the context makes it clear that the destruction to which they were fitted cannot be equated with everlasting death as the theme of this entire section of the Epistle is the ultimate triumph of God's saving purpose for Israel in spite of the temporary and apparent setbacks. The use of the phrase in the Westminster confession to support the doctrine of reprobation is a signal

³⁵ C.H. Dodd, Commentary on Romans, Pg. 171.
Dodd commenting on Rom. 9.22f approves Dr. Moffat's translation "objects of anger" and "objects of mercy". He observes, however, that "the verses are extremely difficult in the Greek" and that "when Paul, normally a clear thinker, becomes obscure, it usually means that he is embarrassed by the position he has taken up".

³⁶ J. Calvin, Commentary on Romans, Pg. 369-70.

example of the danger of taking a text out of context.³⁷

(c) The Doctrinal Perversion caused by the Usage of "Decree".

The reason for "the resourcefulness of grace" being transformed into the theological doctrine of double predestination is found in the term "decree" which the writers used to entitle this doctrine and which completely dominates their interpretation. The term is absent from the New Testament passages which deal with election. "Decree" belongs to the Old Testament where it is used of God six times; of what we now call "laws of nature" four times³⁸, in one place its meaning is uncertain³⁹, and in only one place does it refer to election - the election of the Messianic king.⁴⁰ Hendry suggests that the absence of the word from the New Testament is no accident; for it suggests a fixed and unalterable enactment inappropriate to what the men of apostolic times had come to know of the freedom of the grace of God in Jesus Christ.⁴¹ Brunner has also revolted against this conception of "decree" as making human history a mere "game of chess" and is right in saying that nothing is more devastating for the freedom and reality of decision than the idea that everything is predetermined.⁴²

This criticism is valid, for Scripture does not present us with such a static view of God, working out in history a plan drawn up before creation. The most obvious defect of this outlook is that if everything is predetermined by the Divine decree, how could any other court of appeal be responsible for

³⁷ For a detailed discussion and exposition of Romans 9 see E. Brunner, The Christian Doctrine of God, Vol.1, Pgs. 328-331, and G.C. Berkouwer, Divine Election, Pgs. 214 and 215. cf. C.H. Dodd in his commentary on Romans: it is interesting to note that he does not use the word "predestination" at all in his comments on chapters 9 to 11.

³⁸ Job 28:26 ; Ps. 148:6 ; Prov. 8:29 ; Jere. 5:22.

³⁹ Zeph. 2:2.

⁴⁰ Ps. 2:7.

⁴¹ G.S. Hendry, The Westminster Confession for Today, Pg. 53.

⁴² E. Brunner, Op.Cit., Pg. 306.

anything happening than He who predetermined it? The confessions are landed in an embarrassing situation similar to Calvin's when confronted with the problem of evil and sin. The Westminster confession in the first section under Of God's Eternal Decree has to maintain emphatically that God is not the author of sin and that no violence is offered to the liberty of man. Yet this clashes logically with the previous sentence that "God from all eternity did.....freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass". The compilers were obviously not happy with the position into which they were forced by their first statement, but did not see that this was the result of an unscriptural usage of the word "decree".

The New Testament term is "purpose" (the noun and verb are used seven times in the context of election)⁴³; this indicates that by election God is actively pursuing a goal in and through human history which He has set before Him, rather than mechanically carrying out a decision made prior to creation. Therefore according to the New Testament we may not contemplate what God has decreed before the foundation of the world for "we do not know another decree than the one revealed to us, and there is no other decree"⁴⁴ that is, the decision of God revealed in Christ to save the world.

Together with the above criticism we must consider an idea that constantly recurs in the confessional treatment of election in the words "eternal and immutable counsel" (cf. Gallican and Belgic confessions), "eternal and immutable purpose" (cf. Westminster confession), "the great secret of the counsel of God" (cf. Genevan Confession, 1537), "decreed by His counsel secret to us" (cf. 39 Articles). It is our contention that the confessions in a valid attempt to preserve the sovereignty of God in the scheme of salvation and thereby the

⁴³ Romans 8.28 ; 9.11 ; Eph. 1:9,11 ; 3.11 ; 2 Tim. 1.9.

⁴⁴ Quoted by Berkouwer from L.van der Zanden, Praedestinatie in Christus, Pg. 149.

assurance of election and salvation for pastoral reasons, have unconsciously arrived at a position where doubt and uncertainty are cast on the electing work of God in Christ in history. Although the confessions constantly maintain that this "eternal and immutable purpose" is always "in Christ" they have nevertheless misunderstood the scriptural meaning of "in Christ" for election. This we have already seen was Calvin's mistake, although on numerous occasions he attempted to centre election "in Christ". Reference to the revelation in Christ is an attempt to still the doubts and fears, but at the bottom it is nothing but an impotent pastoral device, an effort to compensate for the "high tension" of the hidden election. Although our election is in Christ for the confessions it is nevertheless "before the foundation of the world" and therefore a decided factor before creation. Thus this "secret" decision cannot but lead to uncertainty in the life of the believer and the Church, since the shadow of the "hidden decree" is always behind the revelation of God's love in Jesus Christ.

What the confessions failed to see was that for the New Testament all salvation lies anchored in Christ. There is not a separate, sovereign decree in eternity followed by the love of God in time for its realisation. As Barth has rightly stated, "before Jesus Christ and above Him and beside Him and apart from Him there is no election, no beginning, no decree, no Word of God"⁴⁵. God's decision or "decree" is identical with the revelation of Jesus Christ: His eternal plan and "decree" are identical with what is disclosed to us in time as His revelation in Jesus Christ. Only the Scots confession seems to understand this fact that in its simplest and most comprehensive form the dogma of predestination is the assertion that the divine predestination is the choice and election of

⁴⁵ K. Barth, Op.cit., Pg. 95.

Jesus Christ in history by the Father. Our election is assured, found, and known in so far as we participate in His election for He is the Chosen One of God.⁴⁶ This is the only sure and sound ground for the assurance of our election, that God's decision is in history in Jesus Christ.

(d) The Influence of Ephesians 1:4 :

While we have denied a pre-historical decree we are, however, still faced with a phrase from Ephesians 1:4 which appears with untiring regularity in the confessions, "before the foundation of the world". With their idea of the immutable and fixed decree, the confessions give the impression that this phrase is to be taken strictly literally so that the plan of God to choose certain individuals for redemption is completed before the beginning of time. This again admits an element of uncertainty and threat as eternity on this understanding represents the unknown and uncertain. Precisely for this reason it is necessary to understand how the words "time" and "eternity" function in the Gospel.

These words do not occur in Scripture as a threat but as a basis for assurance and trust. They are not placed in a context which makes us dizzy in the face of an unapproachable abyss or "eternity", but they are intended to centre our attention on the source of our eternal salvation. The issue is not a metaphysical contrast between time and eternity, but the foundation of salvation in God's plan as immutable reality. "Before" is not to be interpreted in the light of an eternity/time scheme, since it intends to indicate that this divine act of salvation did not originate in flesh and blood, and is therefore in no debt to human merit or creation.⁴⁷ "Before the foundation of the world" means to direct our attention to what

⁴⁶ Luke 9.35 , 23.35.

⁴⁷ cf. Inst. 3.22.2. "By saying they were elected before the foundation of the world, Paul takes away all reference to worth".

can be called the opposite of chance and contingency. Here the certainty and fullness of salvation in history are shown to be anchored in God. Nor may Romans 8 be interpreted in the light of a metaphysical eternity/time scheme where the words "before", "purpose" (vs. 28), "foreknew" and "foreordained" (vs. 29) appear. They imply not a threat but the foundation of certainty and seek to indicate that salvation is rooted and grounded in God, the Alpha and Omega.

(e) The Misunderstanding of the Relation of Time and Eternity:

The above explanation leads us to discuss what may be considered the greatest error and major defect in the confession, namely, the implied conception of eternity and its relation to time. The authors of the confessions did not see that eternity differs from time in quality as well as quantity and thus cannot be viewed as an endless extension of time. As Kierkegaard expressed it, "the infinite qualitative difference between time and eternity!". They viewed the difference between time and eternity in terms of quantity only. Scripture views eternity as "previous" to time and following "after" time as well as breaking into time in the "Christ-event". But for faith the Time known as the "Christ-event" is not simply contrasted with Eternity; it has itself a share in eternity and receives its significance from eternity.

In Scripture God is viewed as being "from everlasting to everlasting" (Ps.90.2) as well as "the Alpha and the Omega" (Rev. 1.8), but in the confessions God is confined to the dimension of His eternity which is antecedent to time, and the relation of His will to the events which come to pass in time is conceived of purely in terms of before and after: for example, "God from all eternity did.....ordain whatever comes to pass" (West. Conf.). The consequence is that the doctrine assumes the cast of a deterministic philosophy, in which there is no real space for human freedom despite verbal protestations

to the contrary, as we have observed. With their mathematical concept of Time the confessions lacked altogether an "existential" understanding of Time where decision and choice is integral to human existence, so that history was viewed in a static way as the unfolding of an unchangeable plan.

But the decisive objection to this form of the doctrine is not that it is destructive of human freedom only. Set in this form it in fact denies the freedom of God - His freedom to be God in all the dimensions of His eternity and to pursue His eternal purpose in time and through time. If all things that come to pass have been determined by God's decree from all eternity then, once the decree has been fixed, God becomes His own executor.⁴⁸ But such a God is not eternal in the full sense of the word; He is only pre-temporal.

The Essential Message of the Confessions:

Now that we have criticised the confessions, however, we must attempt briefly to understand what they were attempting to emphasise and safeguard.

Obviously, the confessions wished primarily to maintain the fact of God's sovereignty and freedom in the salvation of sinful men. For them God is the One who unconditionally precedes the creature in His grace. Man with his decision can only follow. Thus he cannot forestall the purpose and plan of God with any creaturely action or claim. The doctrine of election so expressed showed that God is completely free in His redemptive work and that there could be no other reason for His willing to redeem men than His "good pleasure". All grounds in the creature which might suggest a reason for this salvation were removed so that the source of all redemption was seen to lie in the eternal and electing love of God.

Together with this went an attempt to understand the

⁴⁸ Calvin virtually says this in so many words in Inst. 1.16.8.

biblical doctrine of man in his total corruption and misery; so that all reasons for self-exaltation were shattered, no room for human "works" was left, or for grace being merited by the creature. The confessions must be admired for their fidelity to Scripture in formulating their doctrine of sin; it is only against such a background that we may understand the doctrine of election. Man in his absolutely hopeless state is raised to new life through the sovereign grace of God which finds its source in the electing love of God.

Finally, we must remember that the confessions were written not only to combat impure doctrine but for pastoral purposes, to build up the faithful in the "whole counsel" of God. For them, as for Calvin, what is at stake in the doctrine of election is a positive and evangelical assurance that our salvation is from God and unto God, untouchable by human activity or weakness and unshakeable in its finality. The constant refrain "the eternal and immutable counsel of God" used when discussing the decree was introduced into the confessions to reveal the absolute certainty of salvation, as being rooted in God. They clearly perceived that salvation, as an act of God's sovereign grace, was built upon His electing love which is the only basis for confident preaching of the Gospel. Only on this foundation could the Church be persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor power, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation would be able to separate her from the love of God in Jesus Christ her Lord.

So while the confessions may have "seen through a glass darkly" in their attempts to formulate the truths of Scripture they nevertheless clearly perceived that the Church lives only by the electing love of God and that the centre of her Message is the triumph of Grace in a world of sin and despair.

CONCLUSION.

In our final chapter it is desirable to point the way to a positive approach consonant with Scripture to the doctrine of election. Having appreciated the truths Calvin attempted to preserve in his statement of predestination, we must now try to reframe them and briefly state the direction to be taken in understanding divine election.

It is significant to observe that all the great theologians of the Church have been obliged to give attention to election since it is embedded ineradicably in both the Old and New Testaments. Not without reason has Kuyper referred to this fundamental tenet as "the heart of the Church."¹ But there have been many dangers threatening the "heart" of the Church. Mutilations and unhealthy speculations have produced vehement reactions. In fact, the history of the dogma of predestination could for a large part be described in terms of this reaction. Often the pendulum has swung from determinism to indeterminism, from the concept of arbitrariness to the denial of divine sovereignty, from a terrifying doctrine of rejection to a denial of all rejection. This reveals the estrangement in man's thinking, which no longer understands that both God's sovereignty and His grace, both His love and His justice, blend together.

These reactions and dangers are not solely theoretical for they touch upon the religious life as a whole. As Berkouwer reminds us, "One realises intuitively that in the area of this doctrine decisions are made that are of great importance for a full understanding of God's plan of salvation".² In the study of predestination one is impressed with the disastrous

¹ A. Kuyper, Predicatie, Pg. 43 (1913)

² G.C. Berkouwer, Divine Election, Pg. 8.

results of the unevangelical use of the doctrine, where the "fatherly countenance of God"³ is hidden behind the concept of the "absolute power of God" or behind the frightening idol of a mechanistic-deterministic causality. This, indeed, has often ended in disdain of and vexation about the doctrine of election itself. Well may we take to heart the warning of the divines of the Westminster Assembly, conscious of the difficulty of the doctrine of predestination and aware of its power to provoke interminable argument which may be a substitute for the obedience of faith:

"The doctrine of this high mystery of predestination is to be handled with special prudence and care, that men attending the will of God revealed in His Word, and yielding obedience thereunto may from the certainty of their effectual vocation, be assured of their eternal election. So shall this doctrine afford matter of praise, reverence, and admiration of God, and humility, diligence, and abundant consolations to all who sincerely obey the Gospel".⁴

In beginning a brief reconstruction we must note the fundamental mistake made by many, by which faith has suffered severe injury and theological thinking been led astray into mischievous error. This is the error of equating "predestination" and "election"⁵, as seen e.g. in Calvin. Traditional theology has used the word "predestination" almost exclusively in the discussion of the divine "decrees". The fact that men were able to hold the doctrine of double predestination with good conscience was owing to an unconscious confusion of Election and Predestination. Because they were aware that the doctrine of gracious election is the heart of the Bible but did not perceive that that this is completely different to a doctrine of predestination, the genuine sentiment attached to the doctrine of election was transferred to that of predestination.

³ Canons of Dort. 5.5.

⁴ West. Conf. III. 8.

⁵ In this thesis we have used these two terms as synonyms up until this point

The term "predestination" is used infrequently in Scripture, twelve times only. We are convinced that the Bible is not interested in the numerous philosophical questions into which men have delved in their attempts to grapple with this divine mystery. Equating divine sovereignty with physical or metaphysical determinism, and on the ethical level with fatalism, is a perversion of the spirit of Scripture. Predestination is falsified if it is used in accordance with philosophic categories of thought. On the one hand, it includes the concept of destiny which in modern usage has a meaning foreign to the Bible. In fact, in the thought of the West which is heir to the Greeks, and in many of the great metaphysical systems and religions of the East, destiny has a character of a blind, anonymous force to which divinity itself is often subject; whereas in the Bible destination - not the destiny - of man, of history, and of the universe itself, is the supremely personal work of the loving, wise, free, and sovereign God.

Further, in the word predestination the prefix "pre" puts well-nigh exclusive insistence on the antecedent character of the decree which destines the persons and things concerned. But if in the Bible the eternal before is the beginning of all history, this is not because it preceded it but because it refers to the Person who carries out His purpose. The emphasis is thrown back upon God and His character.

Again, eternity - the antecedent time - is not a time ended and replaced by the time which succeeds it; it is a "time" which is not subject to the succession and annihilation which our time involves. In keeping with the language of the Bible we may affirm that it is the relationship of the Lord of time with all our time - the presence of that Lord, free, sovereign, and faithful, in this fleeting time.

Thus the tormenting and insoluble problems raised by an erroneous belief in "pre"destination are not even touched upon

by the writers of Holy Scripture. Such questions as how can fore-ordination and freedom, predestination and responsibility co-exist do not constitute any problem for the New Testament. For the writers of Scripture were not concerned with an eternity/time scheme, a "before/after" process related to our salvation, or a desire to posit a theory of salvation hidden in some remote eternity to which we in our finite position could never adequately refer.⁶ Rather they use this word to indicate the fact that our salvation is of God, is not of flesh and blood, and does not arise within our temporality: therefore it is secure and unshakeable. Kuyper's words beautifully reflect their thought, "the confession of foreordination is essentially the recognition of grace active long before the hour of conversion". "Predestination" then must be viewed exclusively from the religious point of view as a word used to indicate the security of our salvation and to direct our attention away from ourselves to the God who is the author of our salvation - and must under no circumstances be related to abstract theorising about eternity/time schemes. In fact, "predestination" from this standpoint becomes ridiculous and harms the Christian understanding of God. For while embracing time in His experience, while knowing past, present, and future, God we may believe is not confined as we are within the limits of temporality and successiveness, but transcends these limits. As Donald Baillie has clearly written,

"If He is a God who does things, a living God, we must think of Him as having a positive kind of eternity which has a direct 'vertical' relation to each moment of our temporal experience; and when we speak of His activity we are bound to use temporal expressions though they are inadequate".⁷

⁶ Refer to Pg.129 for an exposition of the words "before the foundation of the world" which applies equally to the word "predestination".

⁷ D.M. Baillie, God was in Christ, Pg. 191.

The term "predestination" is one of these "inadequate" expressions and must be acknowledged as such. From the divine point of view nothing is merely "pre": He is not bound by time.

We must now turn to an examination of God's election, the corner-stone of Scripture, of which Barth has written,

"It is not merely a mode of His saving work, but the mode of the divine saving work; it is not merely a mode of His work in salvation, but the mode of all His work".⁸

In Scripture we are confronted with God's choice or election of man for fellowship with Himself and this doctrine of choice is an integral part of the doctrine of God. Here, more than at any other point of Christian doctrine, we must reiterate the thesis that Jesus Christ is the source and goal of all our knowledge of God. Here the foundation of our dogmatic must be clearly stated: everything which God says about Himself and which we have to say about God is anchored in Jesus Christ. With Christ we must begin, and with Him we must end; and outside of Him there is no kind of knowledge about God. As Barth says, "in Jesus Christ God announces Himself over against all our imaginations and errors". In discussing election, God's election, we may not have anything to do with any theorising which averts attention from Christ. Abstract discussion concerning the election and final destiny of men which avoids concentrating on the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is worse than sterile, and fatal for Christian preaching.⁹ Therefore since Jesus Christ is Himself the meeting-point between God and man, since He is God's turning to man in grace, we can understand election only as an election of grace, where God desires to reconcile all men to Himself.

⁸ K. Barth, Church Dogmatics, Vol. 2., Pt. 2, Pg. 210.

⁹ D.M. Mackinnon, Philosophy and Christology, Pg. 284, an article in Essays in Christology for Karl Barth, edit. T.H.L. Parker.

Emphasis has been laid on three attributes in all the classic expositions of election: the freedom, the mystery, and the righteousness of the electing God. It may be agreed therefore that any attempt to erect a doctrine of election must include these three elements. But all the classic theories fall short when they do not stress that ^{the} electing will is not a naked, abstract decree but it is the will of a God of love who turns to all men in Jesus Christ to be gracious to them. We bow before mystery when we speak of election: but this is the silence of adoration induced by our recognition of our election as of grace. It results from no necessity on the part of God, and from no merit on our part, but has its ground in God's good pleasure alone. But it is His good pleasure: there is nothing higher than His goodness, or anterior to it. God loves always from all eternity and His sole purpose is to ally His life with the lives of men in mutual love. This truth can never be clouded when we keep before us Jesus Christ and not an absolute decree.

There are two different avenues to approach an understanding of election, the subjective and objective, which need not exclude each other. On the other hand, we must bear in mind Mauray's perspicacious insight that a serious error, giving rise to dangerous consequences, is the belief that the doctrine of predestination is the doctrine of the predestined, and not a doctrine of the God who predestines; in other words an anthropological not a theological doctrine.¹⁰

One school has attempted to interpret election from a "subjective" standpoint as man's awareness of and apprehension by God's grace. This not only reduces election to a pure anthropological doctrine, but does not do justice to the "objective" fact of election in Christ. Otto says that,

¹⁰ P. Mauray, Predestination, Pg. 37.

"the idea of 'election' - that is, of having been chosen out and pre-ordained by God unto salvation - is an immediate and pure expression of the actual religious experience of grace".¹¹

This is in fact partly true: the recipient of divine grace feels and knows as he reflects on the past that he has not grown into his present self through any effort of his own and that, apart from his own will and power, grace grasped him, impelled him, and led him. Even the resolves and decisions that were his own and most free become to him, without losing the element of freedom, something that he experienced rather than did. This is in fact the experience of St. Paul: we shall never understand the doctrine as it appears in his epistles until we see that it runs back to the personal experience of a man who, by the fact of his conversion, discovered himself to be elected by God, marked out by divine decree for service and ambassadorship.¹²

The subjective interpretation of election is a constant warning of the danger of rationalising this doctrine. Instead of considering it in its rightful place as supremely a factor of Christian experience, it is abstracted from the grace/faith correlation and considered in terms of human logic. The rational and logical conclusion of one who is elected by God to salvation is that He has also determined the non-elect for damnation. But this conclusion may not be drawn, for an individual's being apprehended by God's grace is the concern of a religious intuition, which stands alone and is only warrant for itself, and which is outraged by any attempt to weave it into a system or make it yield a series of inferences.

We must, however, remember that here we are dealing with God's election and not merely man's awareness of grace; thus we must consider the fact from a theocentric point of view.

Election implies a free decision of God not to remain

¹¹ R. Otto, The Idea of the Holy, Pg. 103.

¹² J.S. Stewart, A Man in Christ, Pg. 143.

satisfied with the fulness of His own independent life, but to allow that fulness to flow out towards beings other than Himself. This decision is not conditioned by anything outside of Himself which might claim or merit it. Nor is it conditioned by anything in His own nature which would make it necessary for Him to enter into fellowship with beings other than Himself, since He already has the fulness of fellowship within His own being. We require therefore to emphasise the two words "choice" and "grace" to describe the relationship established with man in Jesus Christ.

There is no contradiction between the will of God and what is revealed in Jesus Christ. Of necessity they must be identical, and therefore we may not attempt to go behind Christ to some decretum absolutum in the inscrutable will of God: if there were some hidden decree lying behind the decision of God to move outwards to man in Christ revelation would be a delusion.

Here we must depart radically from Augustine and even more radically from Calvin. While insisting that Christ Himself was man's justification, reconciliation, regeneration, sanctification, and redemption, it is strange that when Calvin came to deal with the most fundamental theme of all, the divine election, he sought its ground behind Christ in some decretum absolutum. From our study of Scripture we are convinced that Jesus Christ is not a mere instrument of the divine election, not simply the means by which men are either chosen or rejected, because He Himself is the Chosen One in the midst of humanity.¹³ In Himself He sums up all divine election: the election of Israel, in that He fulfils the promise of the Old Testament; the election of the Church, in that it is in Him that the Church has its life. But at the same time He is also within the counsels of the Godhead, with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Thus He also elects, and we cannot search beyond Him for the

¹³ Luke 9.35 ; 23.35 ; Matt. 3.17 ; 17.5 ; 12.18-21 (R.S.V.)

"primal and ultimately determinative decision of God". There can be no decretum absolutum in which Christ did not share. He is simultaneously the elect and the electing One.

The man to whom God binds Himself is sinful and fallen man. As such he lies under the divine rejection. But God's desire and purpose is fellowship; thus the election of grace, eternal in the counsels of God, is not nullified by man's sin and fall. In Jesus Christ, God takes upon Himself the sentence of rejection and bears it in man's stead to annul it. Calvin was correct in seeking the truth in "double predestination", but misunderstood the object of this predestination. There is in fact no distribution of election and reprobation over certain people, but it is a question of election and reprobation in respect of Christ. Christ as the Elect One bears our reprobation in Himself: because He is "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world". Again, we do not wish to enter a discussion which removes us into the realm of eternity/time schemes; this quotation merely serves to remind us that Christ's bearing of our reprobation has always been within the divine purpose.

We are enabled to speak of "double predestination" only in terms of Calvary where the elect Man assumes our reprobation in His sacrifice. Man being under the wrath and judgement of God has become subject to rejection and death. But in and with the election of Jesus Christ God has loved mankind from eternity. Therefore, representing both God and elected mankind, He bears the rejection. At the centre of God's revelation we find the Chosen One who enters into the sphere of our reprobation to bear and destroy it in Himself.

We may not treat lightly the cry of dereliction and abandonment, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken Me?"¹⁴ This awful cry indicates that He experienced in its full and

¹⁴ Matt. 27.46.

tragic depths the horror of our reprobation. We may not treat this in a crude way as has been done in certain theories of the atonement where the Father is appeased by the Son or where the first and second persons of the Trinity are set in direct antagonism to each other. It is always necessary to remember that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself".¹⁵ Here we do not have the distinct cleavage in the nature of God because love is not set over against justice. God in Christ in holy love grapples with our sin to destroy it: His love enters into our human situation to bear our sin, but this love is entirely antagonistic to sin because of its holy character. Hence the great tensions in the Cross. The terror of desolation and awfulness of our sin, however, may not be minimised. The One who was always in communion with the Father is somehow aware of a great gulf and separation from the Father because of our sin borne by Him, while at the same time the abyss of dereliction is as terrible for the Father as for the Son. St. Paul was bold enough to venture an explanation of that event which passes all understanding in its mystery and terribleness. He says that Jesus was in fact "made a curse for us"¹⁶, which does not cause him astonishment for God Himself "made Him to be sin for us"¹⁷ where "the wages of sin is death".¹⁸ The Son of God has taken our rejection upon Himself and therefore (the heart of the Gospel!) the rejection is no longer man's rightful portion.

Through His Resurrection the election of Jesus Christ is again affirmed, for He has destroyed our rejection in overcoming the power of sin and death. Through His resurrection Jesus Christ is elected for the whole world: men's reprobation is

¹⁵ 2 Cor. 5.19.

¹⁶ Gal. 3.13.

¹⁷ 2 Cor. 5.21.

¹⁸ Rom. 6.23.

annulled and all are potentially elect. According to the New Testament Jesus died for the sins of the world and rose again; ours therefore is a world already "saved" or "elected". This means that the whole of humanity has become involved in this supreme act of God's saving grace: the whole of humanity has been placed under the sign of God's election, within the possibility of becoming "one of the elect".

This does not, however, imply universalism. Universalism may be a heresy equally destructive of the Christian gospel as the doctrine of double predestination. Election is a decisive act of God, but it evokes and creates faith and response. The correlation in the New Testament is always between election and faith. In this correlation the election of God is not made dependent on man's faith, but it is recognised and confessed by way of faith. Election can be experienced and ratified only personally, in spite of the fact that the whole of humanity is the object of God's love. No collectivity can be addressed as "thou"; only the individual can be the subject of direct address.

Election is not a dead "pre"destination in the past or some still point in a timeless eternity, but a living act in time that confronts us face to face in Jesus Christ, the living Word of God. Election is in fact the love of God enacted and inserted into history in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The miracle of the kerygma is this: that through the proclaimed Word, Jesus Christ the Word becomes event in the faith of the believer. Through the kerygma the eternal election continues to become event in time, and continues to complete God's choice of love.

Calvin, we maintain, was correct in his plea that the abolition of the term "free-will" would be of great advantage to the Church. In an age that lightly accepts "free-will" as a presupposition of the Gospel message and of everything else,

it is imperative that we listen to Calvin in his attempt to do justice to the scriptural analysis that man is in bondage.¹⁹ The Jews thought themselves to be free in the time of Christ, but they were to be free only after having been liberated by Christ. Until then they lived in slavery, despite their activity. Their activity was not irrelevant; rather it proves that they were willing slaves. Paul says that men present themselves as the servants of iniquity²¹, as the servants of sin²², and the servants of lust and sensual pleasure²³. It is a time in which man lives in bondage to gods which are no gods²⁴, in which he goes his own way in his so-called freedom, unconscious of his slavery but nonetheless subject to it in all of his existence. "No man can come unto me except the Father draw him".

This doctrine of the bondage of the will is the abiding stumbling-block for any attempts to foster synergism in the sphere of election, any attempt to bring God's grace and man's freedom into harmony and a balanced relationship with each other in order to establish a synthesis. As Berkouwer has remarked, "in no form of synergism is it possible to escape the conclusion that man owes his salvation not solely to God but also to himself".²⁵ Scripture fully honours man's activity; it calls for it and stimulates it, but never makes it part of a synergistic synthesis. The relationship between the source of salvation in God and the decision of man can never be presented as a co-ordinate relationship: rather, the sphere of human activity and decision is, and remains bound to be, the exclusive and gracious act of God in which faith finds rest. The divine

¹⁹ John 8.34-36.

²⁰ cf. John 3.27 ; I Cor. 2.14 ; Rom. 8. 5,6,7,8.

²¹ Rom. 6.16.

²² Ibid.

²³ Titus 3.3.

²⁴ Gal. 4.8.

²⁵ G.C. Berkouwer, Op. Cit., Pg. 42.

act of election makes room and leaves open the possibility for man's act. That possibility is not absorbed or destroyed by divine superiority, but created, called forth, by it. Freedom is conveyed in and through the Gospel²⁶: it is in the sphere where God's redemptive message is made known, where election as "the sum of the Gospel"²⁷ is proclaimed, that freedom is given, that the opportunity for faith is made real, where the possibility of faith is given so that the election of God may be embraced and sealed in the individual's life. Outside of this sphere there is only bondage and death.

What of reprobation? To be reprobate can only be the choice of the godless man - in the light of God's election. To be reprobate (and the Gospels declare that at the Judgement there will be reprobate) is an "un-understandable mystery"²⁸ what the New Testament calls the "mystery of iniquity". To choose our own way in spite of God's absolute choice of us, to listen to the voice of infinite love and to know that we are already apprehended by that love in the death and resurrection of Jesus by the very apprehension of that love to be given the opportunity and capacity to respond in faith and love, and still to draw back into proud independence and selfish denial of the love of God, is an act of unfathomable horror which starkly illustrates the depravity of man's nature.

In God's election, then, the Church finds her strength and her power: if it were not for the fact that all men are already chosen in Christ there would be no hope. But this is the good news of the Gospel that Christ has died for all that whosoever will may be saved. It is in God's election that the Church may find her assurance and comfort, as well as the very

²⁶ 2 Cor. 3.17.

²⁷ K. Barth, Op. Cit., Pg.10.

²⁸ T.F. Torrance, Universalism or Election?, an article in the S.J.T. Vol. 2, 1949. Pg. 317.

basis for preaching the Gospel. In a rediscovery of the truth of this doctrine the Church will in this generation find new life and strength for her world mission. It is because he so clearly perceived the place of this doctrine in the life of the Church that the Church is indebted to John Calvin.

9. CALVIN'S ARTICLES ON PREDESTINATION. *

Before the first man was created God, by an eternal decree, determined what He willed should come to pass with reference to the whole human race.

By this hidden decree of God it was decided that Adam should fall from the perfect state of his nature and draw all his posterity into the guilt of eternal death.

On the same decree hangs the discrimination between the elect and the reprobate: for some He has adopted to Himself to salvation; others He has destined to eternal destruction.

Although the reprobate are vessels of the just vengeance of God, and again the elect are vessels of mercy, nevertheless no other cause of the discrimination is to be sought in God than His mere will, which is the supreme rule of righteousness.

Although it is by faith that the elect obtain the grace of adoption, election nevertheless does not hang on faith, but is prior to it in time and order.

Inasmuch as the origination and perseverance of faith flow from the gratuitous election of God, so none others are truly illuminated unto faith, neither are any others endued with the Spirit of regeneration except those whom God has chosen: but the reprobate must needs remain in their blindness or fall away from faith, if perchance there be any in them.

Although we are chosen in Christ, nevertheless that the Lord considers among His own is prior in order to His making us members of Christ.

Although the will of God is the supreme and first cause of all things and God holds the devil and all the impious subject to His will, God nevertheless cannot be called the cause of sin, nor the author of evil, neither is He open to any blame.

Although God is truly hostile to sin and condemns all iniquity in men, because it is offensive to Him, nevertheless it is not merely by His mere permission, but by His will and secret decree that all things that are done by men are governed.

Although the devil and reprobates are God's servants and instruments to carry out His secret decisions, nevertheless in an incomprehensible manner God so works in them and through them as to contract no stain from their vice, because their malice is used in a just and righteous way for a good end, although the manner of it is often hidden from us.

They act ignorantly and calumniously who say that God is made the author of sin, if all things come to pass by His will and ordinance; because they make no distinction between the open depravity of men and the hidden appointments of God.

* Quoted from B.B. Warfield, Predestination in the Reformed Confessions, Pg. 193. The date of the Articles is not known.

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